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Active Shooter Awareness Training

An active shooter event is an attack in which a person is actively harming or attempting to harm people with a firearm in a populated place. These events are rare compared with the ordinary risks of daily life, and they are also among the most frightening to think about, which is exactly why calm, factual awareness training matters. Fear grows in the dark. When people have never been given clear information — what warning signs can look like, how reporting works, where their exits are, what the standard survival framework is, and what to do when help arrives — their minds fill the gaps with movie scenes and rumor. This lesson set replaces those gaps with steady, public-safety knowledge that anyone can learn, remember, and teach to others.

This training is awareness only. It teaches recognition, prevention, preparedness, escape, and getting help. It does not teach anyone how to carry out an attack, and it contains no instruction of that kind in any form. Its whole purpose runs in the opposite direction: helping ordinary people — workers, teachers, students, customers, faith communities, families — notice concerns early and report them through proper channels, know their surroundings before an emergency, understand the widely taught Run–Hide–Fight framework in its standard public-safety sense, cooperate safely when law enforcement arrives, and build workplace and school preparedness plans that make everyone in the building safer. Everything here follows the general guidance published for the public by safety agencies and taught in workplaces and schools across the country.

Who does this help? It helps the employee who has worked in a building for two years and could not say where the second exit from their floor is. It helps the manager responsible for a safety plan that currently exists only as a paragraph nobody has read. It helps the teacher, the front-desk worker, the usher, the volunteer — the people others will look to in a frightening moment, whether or not that role was ever written into their job. And it helps anyone who has quietly worried about this topic and avoided thinking about it, because avoidance is understandable and preparation is kinder. You do not need special training or equipment to use what follows. You need attention, honesty about your own building and habits, and the willingness to prepare on a calm day for a day everyone hopes never comes.

Why does it matter? Because in emergencies, people do not rise to the level of their intentions; they fall back on what they know and what they have noticed before. A person who has already located two exits, already decided how they would report a concern, already heard that running from danger is the first option and that hands should be visible and empty when officers arrive — that person has a head start measured in seconds, and seconds are the currency of survival. Preparedness also works long before any attack: workplaces where concerns are noticed, taken seriously, and reported through clear channels are places where many kinds of harm, not only this one, are interrupted early. By the end of this set you will understand warning signs and their limits, reporting routes, exit awareness, the Run–Hide–Fight framework, safe behavior when law enforcement arrives, and how a real preparedness plan is built and practiced.

What You Will Learn

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• What an active shooter event is, in plain terms, and why calm, factual awareness training reduces harm better than fear or avoidance.

• Observable warning signs and behaviors of concern — and their honest limits, including why no checklist predicts an attack and why reporting is about getting a concern assessed, not accusing a person.

• How reporting works: what to report, who to tell, and why saying something early through proper channels is a protective act.

• How to know your exits and build everyday awareness of your surroundings without living in fear.

• The Run–Hide–Fight framework in its standard public-safety sense: escape first, hide and barricade if escape is not possible, and act to disrupt only as an absolute last resort when your life is in immediate danger.

• What to do when law enforcement arrives: stay calm, keep hands visible and empty, follow instructions, and avoid sudden movements.

• How workplaces and schools build preparedness plans: roles, communication, drills handled with care, and support after an event.

• How to care for yourself and others after frightening news or an incident, and where the boundaries of awareness training lie.

Lesson 1 — Warning Signs: Noticing Concern Early, and Reporting It Well

Prevention begins long before any emergency, in the ordinary noticing of everyday life. Safety agencies and threat-assessment professionals describe certain behaviors and circumstances that can be signs a person is moving toward violence. Learning them serves one purpose: so that a concern is recognized and passed to people trained to assess it — a supervisor, a human resources department, a school counselor or administrator, a workplace threat-assessment team, or, where there is any suggestion of immediate danger, law enforcement. Awareness training does not turn you into an investigator or a judge. It makes you a responsible noticer and reporter, which is a smaller role and a genuinely powerful one.

The behaviors most often described in public guidance are changes and patterns, not single traits. They include: a person expressing fascination with previous attacks or speaking about violence in a way that sounds like planning rather than opinion; someone talking or posting about intending to harm others, or making direct threats; a noticeable escalation — growing agitation, grievance, or fixation on a perceived wrong, especially combined with statements that there is no other way out; attempts to learn about or gain access to weapons in a context connected to grievance or threats; stalking, monitoring, or repeatedly unwanted contact with a person or place; and sudden, marked changes such as withdrawing completely, giving away possessions alongside hopeless or final-sounding statements, or a sharp decline combined with expressions of violent intent. Circumstances matter alongside behavior: a person in crisis — facing loss, humiliation, discipline, or expulsion — who is expressing violent ideas deserves a

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faster, more caring response, because support and assessment offered early can change a path.

Now the limits, stated plainly, because overstating this lesson would do real harm. Most people who show one of these signs will never harm anyone. Grief, anger, dark humor, political frustration, mental illness, and difficult personalities are common; attacks are rare. Mental illness in particular must not be treated as a warning sign in itself: the large majority of people with mental health conditions are not violent, and treating them as suspects is both unjust and counterproductive, because it drives people away from support. No checklist predicts an attack, and no single sign proves anything. What the signs justify is not accusation but referral: passing specific, factual observations to people whose job is careful assessment, so that support, intervention, or protective steps can happen proportionately. The standard is behavior — what a person did, said, wrote, or attempted — reported in exact words and concrete detail, never labels, diagnoses, or rumors about who someone is.

Reporting well is a learnable skill. Report promptly; memory fades and situations develop. Report through the channel your workplace or school has named — supervisor, human resources, security, counselor, administrator, or tip line — and if you believe anyone is in immediate danger, call 911 first and use internal channels second. Report facts: what was said, in the words used as closely as you can recall them; what was done; when and where; who else was present; and any screenshots, messages, or notes preserved exactly as they are, without editing or forwarding them around. Do not investigate on your own, do not confront the person about your report, do not spread the concern as gossip, and do not promise anyone secrecy you cannot keep. If the first person you tell does not act and the concern remains serious, use the next channel. A report made in good faith, with facts, through proper channels, is a protective act even when assessment concludes there is no threat — because the alternative, silence out of embarrassment, is how warning signs become tragedies in report after report on these events.

The Steps

1. Learn the behavior-based signs: threats or talk of planned harm, fixation on violence or previous attacks, escalation of grievance, weapon-seeking connected to threats, stalking behavior, and final-sounding changes alongside violent statements.
2. Hold the limits firmly: signs justify referral for assessment, never accusation. Mental illness alone is not a warning sign. Most people showing a sign will never harm anyone.
3. When you notice a concern, write down the facts promptly: exact words, actions, dates, times, places, and witnesses, while your memory is fresh.
4. Preserve evidence as it is — messages, posts, notes — without editing, and do not circulate it as gossip.
5. Report through your workplace or school's named channel: supervisor, human resources, security, counselor, administrator, or tip line.
6. If anyone may be in immediate danger, call 911 first. Do not wait for internal processes in an emergency.

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7. Do not confront the person or investigate yourself. If a serious concern is not acted on, escalate to the next channel.

A Worked Example

A team leader in a distribution office notices a pattern over three weeks. A worker who was recently disciplined has begun saying, in the break room, that "management will be sorry" and that he "knows how people handle this." Twice he has shown coworkers videos of a past workplace attack, laughing. This week a coworker mentions he asked where the building's security cameras are and whether the side gate is locked at night. The team leader does not confront him, does not warn the break room, and does not try to decide herself whether he "really means it" — that judgment is not her job. She writes down the statements as exactly as she can recall them, with dates and who was present, and takes them to human resources the same day, saying plainly: "I am reporting behavior I observed, and I am asking for it to be assessed." Human resources involves the organization's threat-assessment process, which speaks with the worker, hears about pressures in his life that nobody at work knew about, connects him with support, and takes proportionate workplace steps. Whether the path would have led to violence can never be known. What is known is that the concern was noticed, recorded in facts, and assessed by the right people early — which is the entire design of prevention, working as intended.

Common Mistakes

- **Treating a diagnosis or a personality as a warning sign.** Report behavior — words, actions, attempts — never who a person is, what they believe, or what condition they may have.
- **Deciding for yourself whether a threat is "real."** Assessment belongs to trained people with the full picture. Your job is to report facts promptly, not to acquit or convict.
- **Waiting to be sure.** Certainty arrives too late. A good-faith factual report that assessment clears has done no harm; silence about a developing situation can do great harm.
- **Turning a report into gossip.** Circulating a concern around the workplace spreads fear, can endanger the reporting process, and may put people at risk. Use channels, not conversations.
- **Confronting the person about your concern.** Confrontation can escalate a situation and is not your role. Report, and let assessment professionals decide how contact should happen.

Lesson 2 — Know Your Space: Exits, Routes, and Everyday Awareness

The single most useful physical preparation for any emergency — fire, earthquake, or an act of violence — is knowing how to leave. In an active shooter event, escape is the first and best option wherever it can be done safely, and escape depends on knowledge you can only gather in advance: where the exits are, where they lead, what the alternatives are when the usual door

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is not the right door, and where a safe place beyond the building lies. Most people, in most buildings, know exactly one route: the way they came in. In an emergency, that route may be the worst one available, and the moment of crisis is the worst possible classroom for finding another. This lesson is about learning your space on an ordinary day, in a way that takes minutes and then quietly stays with you.

Begin with the two-exit habit. In every place you spend real time — your workplace, your school, your place of worship, the store you visit weekly, the gym, the clinic — identify at least two ways out from the areas you actually occupy, not just from the building's entrance. Exits include more than the main doors: side and rear doors, service corridors that lead outside, stairwells on different sides of the building, and, on a ground floor, windows that open or can be exited in a true emergency according to your building's plan. For each exit, learn where it leads once you are through it. An exit that delivers you into a locked courtyard or a fenced yard is not an escape route; a real route continues to open ground and then to a safe distance from the building. Notice also the routes' weak points: the stairwell door that is always propped, the corridor stacked with boxes, the exit whose outside light has been broken for months. These are fixable, reportable details on a calm day — exactly the kind of detail preparedness exists to catch.

Awareness of surroundings is the companion habit, and it needs demystifying, because it is often taught as a state of permanent suspicion. It is not. Healthy awareness is relaxed and intermittent: a few seconds of noticing when you arrive somewhere new — where are the exits, where is the room's door relative to my seat, which way would I go — and then attention returns to your life. You are not scanning for attackers. You are doing what experienced travelers, nurses, and firefighters do automatically: keeping a light, current map of the space so that if anything ever goes wrong — smoke, a medical collapse, a disturbance, violence — your first seconds are spent moving rather than orienting. The same map serves every emergency, which is why this habit is worth building even though the specific event in this lesson set is rare.

Practical details complete the lesson. Know the address of the places you spend time, and where it is posted, so a call for help can give it exactly. Know where your building's meeting or assembly point is, if it has one, and understand that in a violence emergency, the instruction is to get far from the building and not gather in predictable groups near it until law enforcement directs otherwise — a distinction from fire procedure your workplace plan should make clear. Keep everyday items in reach rather than locked away where you cannot get them if you must leave suddenly: phone, keys, essential medication where possible. And if you are responsible for others — children, students, patients, visitors, a colleague with a mobility impairment — your knowledge of the space must include their route and their needs, planned in advance and in line with their personal emergency plan, never improvised in the moment. Preparation that only works for the fastest person in the room is not preparation.

The Steps

1. In each place you spend real time, identify at least two exits from the areas you actually occupy — including side doors, rear doors, and separate stairwells.

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2. Follow each exit mentally to open ground: confirm it does not end in a locked yard, a dead-end corridor, or another hazard, and note where you would go to reach a safe distance.

3. When you arrive somewhere new, take a few seconds to notice exits, the door's position, and your route. Then return your attention to your day — awareness is a habit, not a state of alarm.

4. Learn the street address of your workplace or school and where it is posted, so you can give it exactly in an emergency call.

5. Report blocked exits, broken exit lighting, and propped or locked exit doors through your building's channels on the day you notice them.

6. Know the plan for people you are responsible for — children, students, visitors, colleagues with access needs — and confirm it matches their agreed personal emergency arrangements.

7. Keep your phone, keys, and essential items where you can take them if you must leave quickly, without returning for belongings once you are moving.

A Worked Example

A new administrator at a community health clinic makes exit awareness part of her first week, the way she learns the supply cupboard and the appointment system. From the waiting room she finds two routes: the main entrance she already knows, and a staff corridor behind reception that leads to a rear door opening onto the side street — a door she had walked past daily without registering. From her own office, the nearest stairwell is not the one by the elevators but a smaller one at the corridor's end, closer than she assumed. She notes three fixable things: boxes narrowing the staff corridor, a rear-door exterior light that does not work, and a printed building address that is out of date in the staff handbook. She reports all three through facilities channels; within two weeks the corridor is cleared, the light repaired, and the handbook corrected. She also learns, from the clinic's safety lead, the agreed arrangement for patients with mobility needs in her area, so her map includes other people, not just herself. None of this took more than an hour across a week. She hopes, and expects, never to use the knowledge in a violence emergency — and notes, correctly, that the same knowledge serves a fire, a gas leak, or a medical evacuation exactly as well.

Common Mistakes

- **Knowing only the way you came in.** The entrance you use daily may be the least safe route in an emergency. Two exits, from where you actually are, is the standard.
- **Assuming an exit door means an escape route.** A route that ends in a locked courtyard traps rather than rescues. Follow every route through to open ground.
- **Treating awareness as constant vigilance.** Scanning a room in fear for an hour exhausts people and teaches nothing. A few seconds of noticing on arrival is the sustainable habit.
- **Ignoring blocked or broken exit infrastructure.** A blocked corridor noticed and reported on a calm day is prevention. The same corridor discovered during an emergency is a disaster.

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- **Planning only for yourself.** If others depend on you — children, students, patients, colleagues — your route knowledge must include their needs, arranged in advance.

Lesson 3 — Run, Hide, Fight: The Standard Survival Framework

Run–Hide–Fight is the survival framework taught to the public by safety agencies across the United States, and it is presented here in that standard sense: as a set of priorities for a person caught in an active shooter event, in order, each step taken only when the one before it is not possible. It is not a fighting technique, and this lesson contains no instruction in harming anyone. It is a decision framework for the worst minutes of a person's life, taught calmly in advance so that the decisions do not have to be invented under terror. Learn the order and the reasoning, because the order is the lesson: escape first, always, when it can be done; hide and barricade when escape is not possible; and act to disrupt the attacker only as an absolute last resort, when your life is in immediate danger and there is no other option.

Run. If you learn that an attack is happening and a safe escape path exists, leave. Move away from the danger, toward an exit and then to a safe distance from the building. Leave belongings behind — everything you own is replaceable, and seconds spent gathering are seconds of exposure. Help others escape if you can do so without delaying your own escape or entering danger, and warn people you pass not to enter the area. Do not use elevators; use stairs. Do not pull a fire alarm unless your workplace plan specifically directs it, as alarms can draw people into danger and confuse responders. Once you are out, keep moving to safety — do not gather just outside the building — and call 911 when it is safe to do so, giving the location, what you saw, and descriptions as accurately as you can. If you cannot speak safely, call and leave the line open if your local guidance advises it. Above all: do not run toward responding officers with anything in your hands, and follow Lesson 4's guidance the moment you meet them.

Hide. If escape is not possible — the danger is between you and every exit, or you do not know where it is and moving would expose you — hide and barricade. Choose a room or space that can be locked or blocked. Lock the door; if it cannot be locked, barricade it with heavy furniture and whatever is at hand. Turn off lights, silence phones completely — including vibration — and close blinds or cover door windows if that can be done quickly. Get out of sight, away from the door, spread out rather than clustering, and stay quiet. Do not open the door for voices claiming to be help; law enforcement will have keys or will identify themselves in ways your workplace plan describes, and officers know that real rooms stay locked. While hidden, if it can be done silently and safely, contact emergency services by text where that service exists, or by a call you can make without sound. Hiding is not passivity; done well, it has saved many lives, and it preserves the option to run if a safe path later opens.

Fight — the last resort, described here only at the level the public framework itself uses. If you are confronted directly, escape is impossible, and your life is in immediate danger, the framework says to act with others if possible, with total commitment, to disrupt or incapacitate the attacker using whatever objects are at hand, in order to create the chance to escape. That is the whole of the public teaching, and it is deliberately general: there is no technique to learn in a lesson, no weapon to prepare, and no expectation placed on anyone. It is a statement that in the

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final extremity, resisting together is more survivable than not resisting — a decision no one can make for another person, made in a moment no training can fully imagine. What training can do is remove the false belief that compliance or stillness is always the safest course in this specific kind of event, which differs from a robbery in a way Lesson sets on robbery make clear: in a robbery, comply; in an active killing, the framework above is the taught response. Knowing which situation you are in, and therefore which teaching applies, is itself a piece of awareness worth carrying.

The Steps

1. Learn the order and keep it: Run first if a safe escape exists; Hide and barricade if it does not; act to disrupt only as a last resort when your life is in immediate danger.
2. To run: leave belongings, move away from danger by a known exit, avoid elevators, help others only without endangering yourself, warn others away, and call 911 from safety.
3. To hide: choose a lockable space, lock and barricade the door, lights off, phones fully silenced, out of sight and away from the door, and stay quiet.
4. While hidden, do not open the door for anyone; wait for law enforcement, who will secure the building and come to you.
5. If you can contact help silently and safely — by text-to-911 where available — give your exact location inside the building.
6. Understand the last resort honestly: it applies only when confronted directly with no escape and immediate danger to your life, acting together where possible to create a chance to escape.
7. Keep the distinction clear in your mind: in a robbery, the teaching is to comply and not resist; in an active killing, this framework applies. Different events, different responses.

A Worked Example

Two office workers hear sounds they recognize as gunfire from the floor below, followed by shouting. They have never discussed this moment, but both attended their workplace's awareness session the previous spring. The first worker's desk is near the east stairwell — the route she identified in her own exit practice — and that stairwell is on the opposite side of the building from the sounds. She goes, immediately, leaving her bag, pausing only to tell the people in the two offices she passes to come with her or lock their doors, and she does not wait to gather a group. Outside, she keeps moving to the parking area of the neighboring building, as the workplace plan directs, and calls 911 with the address, the floor where sounds came from, and what she heard. The second worker is in an interior meeting room with no safe route: the corridor outside leads directly toward the sounds. He locks the meeting room door, and with the two colleagues inside, moves the table against it, turns off the lights, silences phones, and sits out of sight along the wall the door does not face. They hear movement in the corridor twice and stay silent and still. They do not open the door when a voice later calls out, until uniformed officers, having secured the floor, unlock it with a building key and give clear instructions, which the workers follow exactly, hands raised and empty. Two different choices, both correct — because each worker read their own position honestly and applied the framework's order to the

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situation they actually had, rather than the one they wished for.

Common Mistakes

- **Reversing the order.** Hiding when a safe escape exists gives up the best option; confronting danger when escape or hiding is possible risks everything needlessly. The order exists for a reason.
- **Stopping for belongings.** Bags, laptops, and coats cost seconds and sometimes lives. Everything left behind can be replaced or retrieved later.
- **Using elevators or gathering outside the doors.** Elevators can deliver you to danger and trap you; crowds at entrances block responders and remain in danger. Keep moving to a safe distance.
- **Leaving a phone audible while hiding.** A ring, a buzz against a desk, a lit screen — sound and light betray a hiding place. Silence fully, including vibration, the moment you hide.
- **Opening a barricaded door for a voice.** Attackers have called out to draw people out. Stay locked in; law enforcement will reach you properly and identify themselves.

Lesson 4 — When Law Enforcement Arrives: Helping Help Reach You

In an active shooter event, the first officers to arrive have one overriding mission: to stop the attack. Everything in this lesson flows from understanding that mission and how it changes what officers do, what they need from you, and what may surprise you if nobody has explained it in advance. People who understand the responders' arrival cooperate with it instinctively. People who do not may, with the best intentions, do things that slow officers down or put themselves in danger. Awareness training closes that gap in a few minutes of calm explanation — which is why this lesson, though short in content, is among the most important in the set.

Expect the arrival to be fast, loud, and unlike any ordinary police interaction. Officers may arrive in teams, in protective equipment, giving loud, repeated commands to everyone: to get down, to show hands, to move in a stated direction. They will not stop to help injured people on their way in — not from indifference, but because every second spent on aid while an attacker is still active produces more injured people; medical help follows close behind them once areas are secured. They may push past you, direct you at speed, or treat every person as a potential unknown until the situation is sorted, including pointing weapons in the direction of movement and shouting. This can be frightening, especially for children, for people with prior traumatic experiences of authority, and for anyone already in shock. Knowing in advance that it will look and sound this way — and that it is procedure in service of stopping the harm, not a judgment of you — helps people endure those minutes and respond as needed.

Your part is simple, and it can be practiced in words anyone can remember: stay calm, keep your hands visible and empty, and follow instructions exactly. Raise your hands, spread your fingers, and keep them up where officers can see them. Put down anything you are holding — a phone, a bag, a tool — because an object in a hand in a chaotic scene can be misread in a

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fraction of a second. Do not run toward officers, grab at them, or reach toward your pockets, waistband, or bag for identification or a phone unless instructed; sudden movements toward hidden places are the single most dangerous thing a person can do in that moment. Move in the direction officers direct, at the pace they direct, without arguing, pointing, or trying to explain the whole event mid-movement. If you have information — the attacker's location, description, direction of travel, where injured people are — give it briefly and clearly when an officer is able to receive it, and expect that the first teams may simply direct you onward; later officers and investigators will take full accounts. If you are leaving a hiding place as officers reach you, come out slowly, hands up and empty, exactly as instructed.

Special situations deserve advance thought rather than improvisation. If you are responsible for children, your job is to model the behavior: hands up yourself, voice low and steady, children close, moving as directed — children take their cues from the adult's body more than from anyone's words. If you or someone near you has a disability affecting movement, hearing, speech, or understanding, communicate it in short, clear statements when it is safe to do so — "I cannot hear; please gesture," "She uses a wheelchair; the lift is there" — and expect officers to adapt once they understand; workplaces and schools should include these needs in their plans so the information exists before it is shouted across a corridor. If you are injured, or with someone injured, say so plainly when officers or medical responders can act on it, and apply the basic first aid you know while waiting if it is safe — but do not leave a secure hiding place to seek help while the event is still active. Finally, understand what follows: you will likely be directed to a safe assembly area, kept there for some time, identified, and interviewed, possibly more than once, and the building will remain a secured scene. Belongings stay where they fell. That is normal procedure, and knowing it in advance turns a confusing, frustrating aftermath into an endurable one.

The Steps

1. Expect a fast, loud arrival focused on stopping the attack. Officers give commands first and provide aid once areas are secure; this is procedure, not indifference.
2. Keep your hands raised, visible, and empty, with fingers spread, whenever officers are present or approaching.
3. Put down anything you are holding. Never reach toward pockets, waistband, or bags unless an officer instructs you to.
4. Follow instructions exactly and immediately: move where directed, at the directed pace, without arguing or trying to explain the whole event while moving.
5. Do not run toward officers or grab at them. If you have vital information — attacker location or direction, injured people — offer it briefly when an officer can receive it.
6. If you are leaving a hiding place, come out slowly, hands up and empty, exactly as instructed.
7. Expect to be directed to a safe area, identified, and interviewed, and for the building to remain secured for some time afterward. This is normal.

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A Worked Example

A school holds its annual staff awareness session, and the local police liaison officer explains the arrival procedure to teachers directly, because she knows the gap between expectation and reality is where accidents happen. A teacher asks the question many are thinking: "If I hear officers in the corridor, should I unlock my classroom and wave them to us, in case there are injured children?" The officer's answer is clear and kind. No — stay locked in, stay quiet, and let officers come to you; they carry keys and a plan, and an opening door in an unsecured corridor creates a problem they must solve at speed. If officers reach your door, follow their instructions exactly as given, bring children out slowly with hands visible — and she demonstrates how she will direct it, so teachers hear the actual words and volume they should expect, and can tell their classes honestly that the officers' loud voices mean help is working, not that the children are in trouble. A second teacher, who uses a hearing aid, raises her own situation; together they note in the school plan that her classroom door carries the agreed internal signal and that she will position herself to see instructions visually. Nothing in the session was dramatic. Every teacher left knowing what arrival looks like, what their own hands should do, and what to tell a frightened class — which is precisely the knowledge that protects people in the minutes when no one can think clearly enough to invent it.

Common Mistakes

- **Running toward officers for safety or help.** Approaching fast, with hands full or hidden, forces officers to treat you as an unknown threat. Stay where you are, hands visible, and let them reach you.
- **Holding a phone or object during the encounter.** In a chaotic scene, an object in a hand can be misread instantly. Empty hands, raised and open, are the universal signal.
- **Reaching for identification or a phone to show information.** Movement toward pockets and waistbands is the most dangerous gesture in this setting. Wait for instructions.
- **Expecting the first officers to stop and give aid or take your full account.** Their mission is to stop the attack; aid and interviews follow. Give brief facts when asked and expect to tell the full story later.
- **Opening a barricaded door when you hear activity outside.** Stay secured until officers reach you and direct you. An opening door in an unsecured area endangers everyone behind it.

Lesson 5 — Preparedness Planning for Workplaces and Schools: The Plan Behind the Day

Individual awareness saves individuals. A preparedness plan is how an organization — a workplace, a school, a faith community, a clinic, a store — makes that awareness collective, so that safety does not depend on who happens to be present, who attended one session, or who keeps their head. A plan is a written, practiced, maintained set of decisions made in advance: how concerns are reported and assessed, how people are alerted, how evacuation and lockdown work in this specific building, who does what, how law enforcement is worked with,

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and how people are cared for afterward. This lesson teaches the anatomy of such a plan at the level any manager, administrator, or safety lead can act on, and it is honest about the plan's purpose: no plan can prevent every event, but a real plan demonstrably reduces harm, speeds help, and gives frightened people decisions that were made for them on a calm day.

A complete plan has six working parts. First, prevention and reporting: the named channels from Lesson 1, a threat-assessment process proportionate to the organization's size, and a culture — built deliberately, by leadership's visible behavior — in which reporting a concern is thanked, never punished or mocked. Second, communication: how an alert reaches everyone in the building fast, in plain words that say what is happening and what to do — through announcement systems, text alerts, or both — including how people in noisy areas, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and visitors who know nothing of the building will receive it. Third, response procedures adapted to the building's real layout: evacuation routes and safe distances, lockdown and barricading for rooms that can be secured, and the Run–Hide–Fight framework taught as awareness to all staff. Fourth, defined roles: who calls 911 (and the rule that in doubt, more than one person should call rather than each assuming another has), who meets and guides responders with building keys and floor plans, who accounts for people at assembly areas, and who speaks to families and media — never improvised by whoever is nearest a camera. Fifth, coordination with local law enforcement and fire services, built before any event: inviting them to know the building, sharing plans and access arrangements, and aligning procedures with theirs. Sixth, recovery: medical and psychological support, communication with families, the practicalities of a secured building and returned belongings, time away, and the return to the space — planned with the same care as the response, because the weeks after an event shape its long-term harm as surely as the minutes during it.

A plan that is written but never practiced is a hope, not a plan. Practice in this context must be handled with the care the Practice Simulators system teaches: announced, explained, proportionate, and never designed to terrify. Tabletop exercises — leaders and staff talking through a scenario at a table, deciding aloud what they would do at each stage — are the workhorse of preparedness, revealing broken assumptions (the alert that does not reach the gym, the assembly point inside the responders' working area, the keyholder who works nights) at zero emotional cost. Walk-throughs of routes and lockdown steps, done calmly and with advance notice, build the physical familiarity Lesson 2 describes. Full drills involving students or the public require particular judgment: many schools now use discussion-based and announced exercises rather than simulations with actors or sounds, because the evidence of distress — especially to children — from realistic drills is real, while the teaching value is available by gentler means. The principle governs all of it: practice the decisions and the routes, protect the people, and never let preparation become its own source of trauma.

Finally, a plan is maintained or it quietly expires. Buildings change, staff turn over, phone trees rot, the construction next door moves your assembly point. The plan needs a named owner, a review date at least annually and after any incident or building change, and a place in new-starter induction so knowledge does not retire with individuals. Leaders should also know the plan's legal and policy neighborhood at the level of awareness: their general duties to provide a safe workplace or school, the value of aligning with local emergency services'

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published guidance, and the need to take specific advice for their own situation — this training is general education, not a substitute for that advice. What a maintained plan gives an organization, in return for a few hours a year, is the thing frightened people need most and cannot manufacture in the moment: decisions already made, roles already assigned, and help already on familiar terms with the building. That is preparedness — unglamorous, written down, practiced gently, and ready.

The Steps

1. Build prevention in: name your reporting channels, set up a proportionate threat-assessment process, and make leadership behavior prove that reporting is thanked, not punished.
2. Design communication that reaches everyone: plain-words alerts by announcement and text, covering noisy areas, deaf and hard-of-hearing occupants, and visitors.
3. Write response procedures for your real building: evacuation routes and safe distances, lockdown and barricading, and Run–Hide–Fight awareness for all staff.
4. Assign roles in advance: who calls 911, who meets responders with keys and plans, who accounts for people, who communicates with families and media.
5. Coordinate with local law enforcement and fire services before any event: share the plan, arrange building access, and align your procedures with theirs.
6. Plan recovery with equal care: support for affected people, family communication, practical arrangements, and a supported return to the space.
7. Practice gently and maintain relentlessly: tabletop exercises and announced walk-throughs, a named plan owner, annual review, and induction for every new starter.

A Worked Example

A mid-sized library system reviews its preparedness after a frightening incident at a branch in another state. Its starting position is common: a two-page procedure written years earlier, stored in a shared drive few staff could locate, and no practice of any kind. The director appoints the operations manager as plan owner and gives the work a season, not a weekend. The team walks every branch with the plan in hand and finds the expected harvest: an assembly point at one branch sits exactly where fire trucks stage; two branches have interior rooms whose doors cannot be locked from inside — the single most important lockdown fact about any room; the alert at the largest branch is an announcement system that does not reach the basement workroom. Fixes are practical and mostly cheap: lock hardware changed, assembly point moved with the fire service's agreement, a text alert added for basement and noisy areas, and a one-page plain-words procedure card placed at every service desk with the address of that branch printed at the top. Staff sessions follow the Practice Simulators pattern — announced, tabletop first, then calm walk-throughs — and the local police community officer visits each branch, receives keys and floor plans through the agreed arrangement, and tells staff directly what an arrival will look like. The plan goes to every new starter's first week. A year later, when a disturbance — not an attack, a shouting man who frightened the reading room — occurs at the main branch, staff use the communication and de-escalation routes they practiced, the desk

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card's address goes to the 911 caller word-perfect, and the director's after-action note records the sentence that justifies the whole season: "Nobody had to invent anything. The plan carried the day, and the day was small because the plan was ready." Preparedness had done its quieter job too: the same reporting culture had, months earlier, surfaced a concern about a former patron's threatening messages, which was assessed and resolved long before it could grow.

Common Mistakes

- **Writing a plan and filing it.** An unpracticed plan stored where nobody can find it is decoration. If staff cannot locate it and have never walked its routes, it does not exist.
- **Copying another organization's plan wholesale.** Routes, locks, assembly points, and roles are building-specific. A borrowed plan describes a building you do not occupy.
- **Leaving roles to the moment.** If nobody is assigned to call 911, meet responders, and account for people, each task waits on a volunteer while minutes pass. Assign, and name backups.
- **Using frightening realism to "make it stick."** Unannounced simulations and theatrical drills distress staff and children and can cause real harm. Announced, discussion-based, and walk-through practice teaches the same decisions safely.
- **Letting the plan expire.** No owner, no review date, no induction — within two years the plan describes departed staff and a rearranged building. Maintenance is the plan.

Try It — Your Preparedness Week

Set aside small pieces of one week — no single block longer than half an hour — and build your personal and workplace awareness in the order this set taught it. On day one, do the noticing work: read Lesson 1 again and write down, for your own workplace or school, the exact reporting channels that exist — the named person, office, or tip line — and save them in your phone. If you cannot find them, that is your first finding: ask your supervisor or administrator, because a channel nobody can name is a channel that does not work. On day two, walk your space: find two exits from where you spend most of your day, follow each one in your mind to open ground and a safe distance, check that the street address of your building is somewhere you can reach it, and note anything blocked, broken, or unclear to report through building channels. On day three, learn the framework cold: say the order aloud — Run, Hide, Fight as last resort — and walk yourself through one honest scenario for your own desk or classroom: if the danger were there, where would I run; if I could not run, where exactly would I hide, what would I lock, barricade, silence. On day four, rehearse the responder minutes in words: hands visible and empty, phone down, follow instructions, expect loud commands and a wait afterward — and if you are responsible for children or others, decide now what you will say and do to bring them through those minutes with you. On day five, look at the plan: find your organization's actual preparedness plan, read it, and note one gap — an unreachable alert, an unassigned role, a door that cannot lock — and pass that single observation, factually and helpfully, to the plan's owner or your supervisor.

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Close the week by sharing the calm, not the fear. Tell one person — a colleague, a family member — the two most useful things you learned, in plain words: how reporting works where you are, and where your two exits are. Teaching steadies your own knowledge and spreads the head start this training exists to give. Record what you did in a few lines for yourself: channels saved, exits walked, gaps reported. That small record is your preparedness made visible — proof that on a calm week, you did the thinking that a hard day would never give you time to do.

Call 911 in an emergency, this is awareness only. Not legal advice. Check with a lawyer before signing. Not medical advice. Check with a doctor or qualified professional. Fortress shares what I learned, not professional advice.

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