

Claflin University



Department of Public Safety

Responding to an Active Shooter Plan

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Responding to an Active Shooter

Introduction

An active shooter is a person who appears to be actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area; in most cases active shooters use firearm(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. These situations are dynamic and evolve rapidly, demanding immediate deployment of law enforcement resources to stop the shooting and mitigate harm to innocent victims. This document provides guidance to faculty, staff, and students who may be caught in an active shooter situation, and describes what to expect from responding police officers.

Notification of an incident

Claflin University should develop an enunciation system that will immediately notify Claflin University family members and visitors that an incident is occurring. This system must be campus wide. In many conditions this system will not be able to direct people to a particular location if the specific area of the perpetrator is unknown. For that reason several instructions were listed below.

Guidance to faculty, staff, and students

In general, how you respond to an active shooter will be dictated by the specific circumstances of the encounter, bearing in mind there could be more than one shooter involved in the same situation. If you find yourself involved in an active shooter situation, try to remain calm and use these guidelines to help you plan a strategy for survival.

If an active shooter is outside your building, proceed to a room that can be locked, close and lock all the windows and doors, and turn off all the lights; if possible, get everyone down on the floor and ensure that no one is visible from outside the room. One person in the room should call 911, advise the dispatcher of what is taking place, and inform him/her of your location; remain in place until the police, or a campus administrator known to you, gives the “all clear.” Unfamiliar voices may be the shooter attempting to lure victims from their safe space; do not respond to any voice commands until you can verify with certainty that they are being issued by a police officer.

If an active shooter is in the same building you are, determine if the room you are in can be locked and if so, follow the same procedure described in the previous paragraph. If your room can't be locked, determine if there is a nearby location that can be reached safely and secured, or if you can safely exit the

building. If you decide to move from your current location, be sure to follow the instructions outlined below.

If an active shooter enters your office or classroom, try to remain calm. Don't do anything to provoke them. If they are not shooting, do what they say and **don't move suddenly** Dial 911, if possible, and alert police to the shooter's location; if you can't speak, leave the line open so the dispatcher can listen to what's taking place. If there is no opportunity for escape or hiding, it might be possible to negotiate with the shooter; attempting to overpower the shooter with force should be considered a very last resort, after all other options have been exhausted. Only you can draw the line on what you will or will not do to preserve your life or the lives of others. If the shooter leaves the area, proceed immediately to a safer place and do not touch anything that was in the vicinity of the shooter.

If they do start shooting people, you need to make a choice, (at this point it is your choice) stay still and hope they don't shoot you, run for an exit while zigzagging. Or even as once before stated, attack the shooter. This is very dangerous, but certainly no more then doing nothing and dying in place. A moving target is much harder to hit than a stationary one and the last thing that the shooter will expect is to be attacked by an unarmed person. Any option chosen may still result in a negative consequence.

Again this is not a recommendation to attack the shooter but rather a choice to fight when there is only one other option.

No matter what the circumstances, if you decide to flee during an active shooting situation, make sure you have an escape route and plan in mind. Do not attempt to carry anything while fleeing; move quickly, keep your hands visible, and follow the instructions of any police officers you may encounter. Do not attempt to remove injured people; instead, leave wounded victims where they are and notify authorities of their location as soon as possible. Do not try to drive off campus until advised it is safe to do so by police or campus administrators.

What to expect from responding police officers

Police officers responding to an active shooter are trained to proceed immediately to the area in which shots were last heard; their purpose is to stop the shooting as quickly as possible. The first responding officers will normally be in teams of four (4); they may be dressed in regular patrol uniforms, or they may be wearing external bulletproof vests, Kevlar helmets, and other tactical equipment. The officers may be armed with rifles, shotguns, or handguns, and might also be using pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation. Regardless of how they appear, remain calm, do as the officers tell you, and do not be afraid of them. Put down any bags or packages you may be carrying and keep your hands visible at all times; if you know where the shooter is, tell the officers. The first officers to arrive will not stop to aid injured people; rescue teams composed of other officers and emergency medical personnel will follow the first officers into secured areas to treat and remove injured persons. Keep in mind that even once you have escaped to a

safer location, the entire area is still a crime scene; police will usually not let anyone leave until the situation is fully under control and all witnesses have been identified and questioned. Until you are released, remain at whatever assembly point authorities designate.

Police agencies nationwide are designing training programs to address the possibility that they might face similar threats in their jurisdictions. The ultimate goal of these programs is to eliminate and minimize casualties in the event their officers are met with this challenge.

Police departments do not have to wait until bullets are flying and people are dying to stop the Active Shooter. Officers can step between the shooter and his intended victim long before the screaming and the bleeding. An arrest can be made in one of the earlier stages of the Active Shooter's development.

There are five phases of the Active Shooter phenomenon:

1. Fantasy Stage

During this stage the shooter pictures himself doing the shooting. He fantasizes about the headlines he will receive. He fantasizes about the news coverage. He might draw pictures of the event and make Web site postings. Would-be Active Shooters in the Fantasy Stage will often discuss their desires with friends and foes alike. If news of these fantasies is passed on to law enforcement, police intervention can take place prior to the suspect acting on them. In this case there will be zero casualties.

2. Planning Stage

In this stage the suspect is deciding on the "who, what, when, where and how" of his day of infamy. He will often put his plans down in writing. He will quite often discuss his plans with others. In timing his move, he might decide to attack on a day the school's liaison officer will be in court. He will plan the time and location to insure the most victims, or in some cases to target specific victims.

He will determine the weapons he will need and where he will get them. He will decide how to travel to the target area and how to dress to conceal his weapons without arousing suspicion.

If the police are tipped at this time, once again intervention can be made prior to any rounds being fired, keeping the death toll at zero.

3. Preparation Stage

During this stage the suspect may be obtaining gun powder for his improvised explosive devices. He might break into grandfather's house to steal some weapons and ammunition for the event. He might pre-position weapons and explosives for the assault. Active

Shooters have been known to call friends and tell them not to go to school or work on the scheduled day of the attack in an effort to keep them out of the line of fire.

If one of these friends calls the police about their concerns, officers have an opportunity to intervene before the event.

4. Approach Stage

The closer to the event, the more dangerous it will be for any officer taking action. The Approach Stage is a very dangerous stage. The suspect has made his plans and decided to act. He will be walking, driving, or riding toward his intended target, armed with his tools of death.

Contact with the soon-to-be Active Shooter could come in the form of a citizen call, a traffic stop or a "Terry Stop." A thorough investigation can still lead to an arrest of the suspect before he brings down a multitude of victims in a needless shooting or bombing.

Make no mistake about it, the officer making contact with the suspect during this stage is in danger, but as long as he or she keeps an open mind on every single street contact, they can stay safe. There is a fine line between having your name on an award and your name on a wall. The difference is often being prepared, being aware and being highly skilled. This contact, if approached in a trained, tactically sound manner, could become a life-saver, a career-maker, and end in zero casualties.

5. Implementation Stage

Once the shooter opens fire, **immediate** action needs to be taken. Initial responding officers need to rapidly proceed to the suspect and stop the threat. The Active Shooter will continue to kill until he runs out of victims or ammunition. This suspect is unique, because he is fully dedicated to going for the "top score," which is measured in number of kills. The more people that are killed, the better the shooter feel.

The sooner an on- or off-duty officer intervenes with an effective, efficient act of courage, the fewer funerals. In past incidents, Active Shooters have been thwarted by police officers, security guards, school teachers, (one principal recently died successfully stopping an active shooter in a Wisconsin school), and in one case a high school football captain.

Responding officers will be able to utilize these following factors to their advantage:

- An honorable gunfighter is needed to stop the shooter.
- A police officer is a trained, honorable gun fighter.
- The Active Shooter will be highly focused on the killing.
- The scene will be loud and chaotic.
- An officer can use the chaos as cover to move quietly to a position of advantage.
- Terrified victims will be able to direct you to the shooter.

- The sound of the shooting will also help direct you to the shooter.
- Upon arriving, if it is an Active Shooting in Progress you do not have to verbalize if it endangers yourself and others. **Take the shot.**
- If you manage to contain the subject in a non-violent pose, initiate a classic SWAT response.

On-Duty Tactics

A single officer responding to an Active Shooter call must realize that he or she can minimize casualties by the successful actions they take, but he may not be able to completely prevent all loss of innocent life. That officer must remember that the shooter--not the officer--is ultimately responsible for those deaths. This is a critical point to understand and believe in order to better insure emotional recovery after a traumatic event like this.

Upon arriving at the scene there will be little time for thought so the preparation should be made in advance. The officer has to decide in a moment whether to contain and wait for additional units or to take immediate action, if innocents are dying with each shot.

You may have to risk your life. This is a dire situation and we may take casualties.

Remember “long guns for long halls.” Put superior fire power into your hands and radio as much information as possible as you move. Making an entry with four is better than three. Making an entry with three is better than two. Making an entry with one is better than nothing.

Do not throw your life away. Breathe. Think and advance using the chaos as your diversion. You may have to pass areas that have not been cleared. You may have to ignore fleeing witnesses who scream, *“He has an AK-47! He’s killing people! He’s killing people! He’s in the office right now!”*

Gather as many facts as you can on the move. You may have to move right by injured and deceased victims without stopping to help. You must attempt to move to a position of advantage that affords you a field of vision and cover as well as a clear shot at the suspect as quickly as possible. Attempt to do this without alerting the suspect of your presence.

Quickly assess the suspect’s actions and if he is in the process of shooting and killing then do not advise, warn, or request. Take the shot! Make the shot! Break up your tunnel vision and look for additional threats. Communicate your actions, the situation and location. Reload during the lull. This should be done all while watching the downed suspect and looking for accomplices. Secure the suspect. Assess his condition.

Off-Duty Response

As you read this, if you carry off-duty, take the time to ask the following:

Do I have a weapon I have trained with?
Do I have a way to identify myself as a police officer?
Do I have a way to secure a suspect I have shot or arrested off-duty?
Do I have a way to communicate (cell phone)?
Do I have reload capability?
Have I participated in hands-on “Active Shooter Response” training?

If you answered no to any of these questions you need to take some kind of additional action so you can answer yes.

If you do not carry off-duty, take the time to ask the following:

Should I carry off-duty in today’s post 9-11 world?
If someone was shooting in my child’s school, would I take action armed or not?
If I was about to be shot by an Active Shooter, would I refuse to go quietly into the night?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you need to consider carrying a weapon off-duty. Your first step should be to check your department’s policy and the laws in your area.

The Law

Due to recent changes in Federal law it is much easier for a sworn police officer to carry a concealed weapon out of their jurisdiction when off-duty. New Federal law has also been enacted to allow for retired police officers to carry concealed weapons if they are trained and have proper identification and authorization from their agencies.

The responsibility of Clafin University

Experience has demonstrated that one of the primary needs of victims and survivors of victims of crimes is information. Accurate and relevant information is often a commodity victims find difficult to obtain. In many high profile cases victims have little choice but to rely on media for current information rather than official sources.

There are many tangible and intangible benefits of conducting briefings for victims and victim families. Briefing meetings allow victims to receive the same information at the same time, which is important for both clarity and to ensure equitable treatment. Briefing meetings provide an opportunity for victims to address their questions directly to officials with responsibilities for responding to these crimes. Victims may not receive new or confidential information from briefings, but the importance of receiving the information from an official source can not be overstated. Information about the individual roles of the multiple agencies involved in the case can reduce confusion. Ultimately, briefings can promote victim confidence in the University’s response and result in increased cooperation on the part of victims

Sooner is better than later when organizing victim briefings. Some of the briefings conducted for victims of terrorism cases were held close in time to the criminal act while others were conducted a few years later.

Information provided to victims should be tailored to the stage and unique aspects of each case. For example, the first meeting after the attack should provide basic information on response, victim services, and may not be available or ready answers, particularly by the officials conducting the briefing, but there should be a plan for how to handle these questions if they arise.

- Difficulty and delays in obtaining information about recovery of victims from officials is another source of frustration that may be raised in brief meetings. In the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack, their frustration is often with obtaining information in a timely manner. The importance of timely information about the identification and condition of victims cannot be overstated, yet these very issues can be the most difficult for officials to address during the chaos that follows a mass casualty disaster. In these days of instant media, the news of an event will be public before the responding agencies have the ability to determine and confirm the identity of victims and their status. Conditions at the scene may make it extremely difficult to find and recover bodies. Bodies may be severely fragmented or completely destroyed. Forensic identifications may require DNA testing that will take a significant amount of time to perform. It may be impossible to recover complete remains at all or except in stages. Families may have questions about the autopsy process and results and what happens with unidentified remains. Understandably, families will be anxious, frustrated, and impatient. Delays in notification and recovery of victim remains can exacerbate grief and anger, especially if families are not provided with an explanation of the difficulties causing delays. If they are not receiving honest and accurate information from public officials, the families will return to other sources that may not be as accurate. Resolution and finality about the status of victims and remains is critical to their ability to accept death and to begin mourning.
- How death notification was handled is an issue that many families seem to dwell on, particularly if they feel it was handled insensitively. Families may need to ventilate some of their feelings surrounding this issue.
- Questions about the appropriate official response to terrorism are common. Victims may focus on issues around options such as military vs. sanctions vs. criminal justice responses. They may ask if the government is doing everything it can and should. Also, they may focus on whether the ultimate architects of terrorism can be held accountable.
- There may be questions or concerns raised about whether the government is doing enough to help victims. Official recognition of their losses at the highest level of government is important to many terrorism victims, especially since they believe their loved ones were killed because they are viewed as representing the United States government and its policies by terrorist organizations.

Basis Tips for Structuring Briefings

- Planning ahead is critical.
- Anticipate common and case-specific issues.
- Face-to-face briefings are best, but innovative use of technology may be necessary if there are large numbers of victims who are widely dispersed geographically or if there is an urgent need to get information to victims. The NTSB often uses telephone bridge calls to conduct live briefings with hundreds of family members of aviation disaster victims. Scottish prosecutors used the video conferencing capabilities of the system created to deliver an encrypted broadcast of the Lockerbie trial to families in the United Kingdom and the U.S. for briefing meetings at key points during the trial. The Lockerbie Trial Families Web-Site was used on several occasions to “web-cast” briefings, including one with Secretary of State Colin Powell following the verdict.
- Include key agencies depending upon the type of event and the individual factors of the event. It may be helpful to include recovery officials or forensic pathologists to answer questions related to recovery and handling of remains.
- It is a good idea to survey victims about their concerns and questions ahead of time. This can often be done informally at the time they are notified of the briefing.
- Plan to have a “meet and greet” function at the security checkpoint, with an emphasis on non-inflammatory problem solving.
- If possible, provide an opportunity for victims/families to meet and mingle before the briefing starts. It may be helpful to meet with more volatile/vulnerable individuals to allow them to ventilate beforehand.
- Have an agenda and provide it to the families. Include a list of who will be presenting and which agency they represent.
- Provide a thorough explanation of different agency roles. Have a facilitator who can direct specific categories of questions to the appropriate person or agency.
- In most cases, it may be better to address issues of primary concern to the victims first. Otherwise, it will be difficult for them to focus on other issues and information.
- Whenever possible, responsible officials should be prepared to remain for most or all of the briefing, or at least their particular portion of the briefing. “Ducking out” of an event may make the agency or official appear insincere about their purpose, or worse.
- Provide for breaks if briefings are longer than an hour and a half. Get feedback from participants and adjust the agenda and approach if necessary.
- Recognize and be willing to accommodate, within reason, divisions within families. Some families are fractures before the terrorist event and others will fracture in the aftermath. Whenever possible, it is a good idea to honor their request for multiple points of contact.
- Plan for a transition between the end of the briefing and the departure of victims/families to allow time for reflection, gathering of thoughts, questions or stress reduction in a non-threatening environment. This is especially important if the information presented in the briefing was distressing. The transition could be as simple as a quiet reception an informal memorial service, or a feedback

session. The transition period should be staffed by the victim/family support team.

Site Selection

- Ensures privacy but not total isolation. If staying overnight, families need down time in the evening and privacy to speak among themselves without an official present.
- Provide safety and security for meeting areas.
- When possible, it is a good idea to house families together on a few floors with security to provide privacy.
- Include an adequate area for a group “quiet room” (used for transition) and individual interviewing and counseling/debriefing rooms. If possible, arrange for a private interview room outside the security checkpoint to meet privately with problem visitors.
- Include meeting space (especially at hotel) for informal victim gatherings. There is often a special bond between families of victims who spent their last moments together and perished in the same event, even if those victims were not acquainted with each other before the attack. At the same time, individuals and families react differently to a traumatic loss and have different expectations, priorities, and perspectives. Expect differences and tension to exist among the families.
- Control access to families by the media. Some families actively seek out the media, but others seek to avoid any media contact and should be protected from unwanted contact while on the site. There should be no media in meetings.
- Avoid sterile environments- site should be comfortable.

Supporting Players

- Organize a victim/family support team and include victim assistance staff in the planning. The support team members should meet ahead of time and be clear about their role and mission. Identify a team leader.
- Include mental health professionals and/or clergy. Make sure they are briefed ahead of time regarding any information that may be particularly disturbing to victims. Mental health providers should maintain a low-profile presence. They can be introduced along with victims assistance staff as counselors who are there for emotional support. Let victims/families know they are there and where to find them. It is a good idea to have the mental health team quietly observe proceedings so they can flag potential issues and vulnerabilities.
- Have a plan for handling medical emergencies. It is a good idea to have at least a nurse on hand, and a defibrillator. Staff should know where the nearest hospital is located and someone should be designated to summons an ambulance if needed. In pre-briefing contacts with families, organizers should ask about special medical problems and advise people to make sure they bring important medication with them.
- Use familiar faces when possible. These can be agency personnel who provided help in immediate aftermath, e.g., officers who escorted families to memorials,

crisis assistance personnel who met with victims and families, or FBI agents/victims specialists from victim's home area.

Tips for Survival and Success

- Remember that shock and grief have an impact on the ability of victims and families to process, absorb, and retain detailed information. Provide simple explanations. It shouldn't be assumed that victims understand the criminal justice system. Whenever possible, provide important information in writing as well.
- Take time prior to the briefing to learn about the victims and their families. If possible, personalize the briefing arrangements by knowing the names of the victims and something about them. Use the names of the victims when speaking with their families. This will help in making connections with the families and will help demonstrate that officials recognize the individual losses involved.
- Be prepared for lack of clarity among victims about the roles of the government agencies involved and for some hostility towards the government. Most people do not have an in-depth understanding of the organizational structure of the U.S. government, including the official roles of individual agencies. For many people, the government is simply one big bureaucracy. If the victims were from the military, their families may have knowledge of the service branch to which the victims belonged, but they may not have any knowledge about the Department of Justice and the criminal justice process. These issues may be exacerbated when the terrorist event occurs outside the borders of the United States. Be aware that victims may not have a great deal of trust in the government and that losing a family member in a terrorist event may result in a further loss of trust or belief in the ability of the government to safeguard its citizens.
- Be prepared to explain why other responsible officials are not available to the briefing, as well as how soon and under what circumstances they may be available at a later date. This became a volatile issue for families and surviving victims of the U.S.S. Cole briefing when they learned the commander of the ship was not present at the meeting. Victim families were extremely angry and dozens of crew members left the briefing in protest.
- Introduce the official participants, even if people do not have a formal role in the presentation of information. Otherwise, victims will wonder who all "those people" are and feel like they are in a fish bowl. Limit the number of official observers to only those who are necessary, and try to avoid having more government officials than victims.
- Have a strategy for addressing misdirected questions and concerns. It may be necessary to remind victims of which agency has official responsibility for a particular issue. Try to ensure that no victim goes away without an answer or a specific plan to research the question and get back to them. Avoid simply promising that someone will get back to them. Give victims a name and contact number.
- Be as open and thorough as possible. If officials cannot answer a particular question, then an explanation should be given for why that question cannot be answered at that time. Presenters and organizers will need to balance the

- openness necessary to create trust and confidence with the realization that any information provided to the victims/families may be repeated to the media.
- Ensure that agents, attorneys, and other staff participating in the briefing have appropriate training on effectively dealing with victim families, including common stress-related behavior, crisis communication, and non-verbal communication. It will also help to prepare participating staff for the potential personal impact associated with such emotionally charged events.
 - Prepare for intense emotion, including grief and anger. The closer in time to the event, the more intense and raw will be these emotions. The larger and more horrible the event, the stronger the sense of horror and outrage. Victims and families will respond in different ways: some will be quiet and appear stoic or numb while others will be extremely vocal and expressive. Do not take their anger personally. Anger is a natural and understandable reaction to a devastating loss. Victim anger is often directed at the closest and safest target, or the institution that victims perceive as having the power or responsibility to have prevented the crime. Until perpetrators and planners behind a terrorist act are identified and caught, they may remain as shadowy and unreal figures to victims. Officials to whom a victim's anger is directed should avoid becoming angry and defensive. The best response may be to preface any answer with the words, "I'm sorry," or "I can understand why you are so frustrated/angry." If there is no good answer to a victim's question or concern, then it may be best to simply say, "I wish I could give you an answer that would help you, but I just can't. It may help briefing presenters and responsible officials to put themselves in the victim's shoes and imagine how they would feel in the same circumstances and how they would want to be treated.
 - Identify and correct misperceptions and misinformation when possible. Victims may have inaccurate beliefs and perceptions about the events surrounding the crime. The immediate circumstances of the aftermath of a terrorist or mass casualty event are usually chaotic. Information about the identity and condition of victims may be difficult to obtain and verify, and investigations take time. It does not take long for speculation in the media and on the Internet to fuel rumors and create misperceptions among victims and the public. In addition, shock and grief may affect the accuracy of what victims remember and perceive about information they have received. Presenters should be prepared to explain some of the aftermath. In several cases, grieving families of victims have had misperceptions about why it took so long to recover the bodies of their loved ones. In one situation, a victim's mother believed that the FBI unreasonably delayed recovery of bodies in order to facilitate evidence collection, when in reality it was unsafe for rescue workers to recover the bodies until structural supports could be put in place.
 - Avoid isolation officials and victims. Allow opportunities for mingling and individual conversations.
 - Consider feedback sessions with families. At the Khobar Towers Family briefing, an informal meeting was held at the end of the presentations to give victim families an opportunity to provide specific feedback to a small group of officials. Seating was arranged in a large circle, and the meeting was guided by a neutral

and experienced facilitator. Families were encouraged to introduce themselves, tell something about the deceased family member, and share something about their experience what helped, what hurt, and what would have been helpful if available. This exercise is only useful if families are confident that their recommendations are documented and will be taken seriously. A victim feedback session may also be helpful to officials in determining the most effective ways to provide information and services to this group of victims during the course of the investigation and any further prosecution.

- Leave victims with concrete information about what to expect from agencies in the future and a point of contact.

Conclusion

Victim briefings can be challenging and emotionally-laden events for both victims and officials, but they have many immediate and long-term benefits. If conducted with planning, openness, and sensitivity, briefings can be a critical mechanism for fulfilling the legal obligation to keep victims informed. Victim briefing meetings can help build a trusting relationship between criminal justice officials and victims. Briefings can demonstrate to victims of terrorism that “the government” is not simply an impersonal institution that hides behind austere, gray buildings in Washington, but one that recognizes their individual losses and the responsibility of government to assist its citizens.

- **This plan only offers suggestions of what you could do if you are involved with an Active Shooter situation. This Plan is not meant to be put into place as a Claflin University Policy.**

Chief Pearson