

PRINT-Police Advice: 'Fight or Die' as Last Resort with Active Shooter

Jenna Farmer-Brackett works for the Centerstone Mental Health agency in Alton, Illinois but the only active shooter training she's received was in the form of watching videos produced by a national organization. However, she recently was among a room of nearly 90 employers, school and government officials, and residents from the Alton-area who recently received Active Shooter training as part of OSF HealthCare's **Healthy Workplace** on-going series.

OSF Saint Anthony Health Center President Ajay Pathak said the most recent lunchtime event is part of a continuous effort to collaborate with community employers and other leaders to address issues impacting their workplace and their community.

"And when we think about Active Shooter training, that's very much along those themes of perpetual readiness and prevention -- being prepared and understanding how to mitigate the situation," he said to an at-capacity room at the hospital.

Healthy Workplace events have also addressed issues such as the opioid epidemic and preparing for legal use of recreational marijuana in Illinois. Pathak said it's important the community and employers in particular be prepared given the fact schools account for just one-third of all active shooter situations.

"I think all of us are very well aware that in the region and at a national level, gun violence has continued to become more and more problematic to the point at which I think it's fair to call it an epidemic. It's certainly a public health crisis," according to Pathak.

Three Alton police officers went through their version of the run, hide, or fight training. They use a model called the 4Es -- "Educate, Evade, Escape and Engage."

Sgt. Jeremiah Dressler said the most important take-away is to be aware of your surroundings including know the location of exits and even plotting possible areas to hide, particularly in the workplace.

"If the offender comes in here, if he comes in this door, where can I get to, where can I run, where can I hide?," he advised attendees to consider. Dressler continued outlining factors to take into account. "If I know information that he's further down the hallway, is there a place that I can escape? What room is locked? Alright, how does that door lock? How can I secure that door?"

Farmer-Brackett said having in-person training from local professionals who have life experience was, as she put it, "an opportunity I couldn't miss."

She especially appreciated advice about what to do *after* the shooting. She'll be sharing that with co-workers.

"You know there are multiple options: run, hide, fight. For those that are hiding, let it be hide and seek and let the officer find you and do not remove yourself from that spot until you see that officer come on sight, right there with you to find you," Farmer-Brackett recalled from the training.

The training also emphasized that in some cases, it can take police hours to secure the scene. If the gunman is somehow disarmed, Dressler warned not to touch the weapon or attempt to use it on the shooter. Farmer-Brackett said she never considered what she would do in that scenario. She'll remember what she learned.

"Hide it, get it away, throw it in the trash, throw it in a drawer they even said. That way it's out of sight." She added, "If the gunman's trying to look for it, it's not going to be easy to find and when the police and other law enforcement respond to the scene, you don't look like the person holding the gun and potentially the gunman in that scenario."

Alton police officers described the phenomenon of tunnel vision that occurs in stressful situations. It can cause potential victims to freeze as was the case with some of the victims in the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 and the second-deadliest school shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007 in which 32 people were killed.

Sgt. Dressler said fighting should be considered as a last resort but he said there's a hard lesson coming out of the examination of past mass violence events. "It's either fight or die."

He explained research about perpetrators of mass shootings has found the gunmen are set on leaving a high body count and by the time they're carrying out plans, "They don't want to negotiate and they don't want to be talked down."

During a break in the training, Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons handed out free gun locks to ensure safe gun storage. According to the [Giffords Law Center](#), roughly 4.6 million minors live in homes with loaded, unlocked firearms.

To learn more about another Healthy Workplace Active Shooter training in your area or to suggest a topic for the series, contact [Chad Holloway](#) at 309-308-9602.