

Notes on active shooter incidents

While the U.S. homicide rate overall has fallen in recent years, the number of active shooter events, that is where a person with a gun attempts to kill people in a confined and populated area, [has increased in the U.S. since 2000](#). The disaster psychology literature tells us that when faced with sudden, fearful events that are unfamiliar, our natural tendency is to go into **denial**. This is because our brains try rapidly to find prior experience to work from, get "no search results found", then our backup plan is to look to see if anyone else has a "search hit". The psychology and neuroscience of this is described in the book [The Unthinkable: who survives when disaster strikes](#). If we find ourselves in the midst of an active shooter event, particularly in a classroom situation, this means we will likely have one of a number of reactions, such as freezing (everyone gets in a loop of "no search results found"), thinking our senses must be giving us bad information ("that probably wasn't a gun"), or pulling out an inappropriate experience, such as treating the event as if it were a fire alarm, or making jokes. We tend to not want to be seen to be over-reacting. In an active shooter event, seconds are critical, so we cannot afford to risk this happening. This psychology was likely behind the surprisingly inappropriate responses of professors during the Purdue shooting incident (see [Purdue Review article](#)). Here are some steps you can take **before** an incident, to make sure this doesn't happen.

- Watch the [IU Run-Hide-Fight video](#). This is one of the single most useful things you can do. RUN-HIDE-FIGHT is a clear and research-supported immediate action plan for individuals to make good decisions on the scene of a shooting. Students should be encouraged to take their own action based on this, regardless of what a professor says. Instructors should be prepared to take an immediate and authoritative lead in RUN-HIDE-FIGHT. "Programming" the RUN-HIDE-FIGHT approach into your brain will mean you will "have a search hit" of an appropriate response if something happens
- Instructors should think through a RUN-HIDE-FIGHT plan for their classrooms at the start of the semester, including knowing where the exits are, examining the windows to see if they can be opened as an exit route, and examining the doors to see if they can be blockaded. If you feel comfortable doing it, you might also run through the RUN-HIDE-FIGHT process with students in the class at the start of the semester

If you think you hear gunshots and/or screams or you hear a report of a person with a gun in the building you are in, immediately start a RUN-HIDE-FIGHT decision making process for yourself, and lead others around you in this, including any class you are teaching. Once you are in a safe place out of the building, dial 911 and give as much detailed information as possible.

If you get information about an active shooter elsewhere on campus (for example through IU Notify), you should be prepared for an extended period of time with very little information. RUN-HIDE-FIGHT still applies here - if you are able to get away from campus safely without going anywhere near the scene of the shooting, this is probably the best thing. If you are running a class, and you get this kind of notification, the best approach is probably to stop class, close doors, stay away from windows, and [make a RUN-HIDE-FIGHT plan with the students](#) for if a shooter came in proximity. You should also make a plan for how to handle bathroom visits, etc. Note that we have no authority to prevent people leaving if they wish. In the instance of an active shooter alert elsewhere on campus, SOIC Emergency Response Team members will attempt to find out more information and will circulate to pass this on.

For more recommendations and information, see the [IU Active Shooter page](#).