

# Insurance Board Presents: Active Shooter FAQ

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
AND INSURANCE BOARD'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS



**Several congregants have mobility issues, including some who use walkers or wheelchairs. They are unable to run or hide. Responses need to consider these individuals.**

Thank you for raising this concern—it's a critical part of ensuring everyone's safety.

For individuals with mobility challenges, including those using walkers or wheelchairs, the standard "Run, Hide, Fight" guidance in active shooter situations may not be fully applicable. Instead, we recommend the following adapted approach:

## 1. Shelter in Place (Hide)

- If evacuation is not possible, the safest option is often to shelter in place.
- Identify pre-designated safe rooms that are accessible and can be locked or barricaded.
- These rooms should ideally have communication access (e.g., a phone) and low visibility from the outside.

## 2. Assisted Evacuation Plans

- Develop a buddy system or assign trained volunteers to assist individuals with mobility limitations during emergencies.
- Ensure evacuation routes are accessible and clearly marked.
- Practice inclusive drills that account for different mobility needs.

## 3. Communication

- Make sure all individuals, including those with disabilities, are aware of the plan and know what to do.
- Use clear, calm instructions during an emergency, and consider visual or auditory aids if needed.

## 4. Training and Preparation

- Offer active shooter response training tailored for people with disabilities and those who assist them.
- Include scenario-based discussions to help individuals think through their options in advance.

**How involved should the pastor be in executing the safety plan, such as calling 911 or assisting people outside? There is a concern that the pastor might become one of the first victims in the event of an incident due to their visibility at the front of the church. However, it is uncertain whether the data support this concern.**

Tasks like calling 911 or assisting with evacuation, especially in a chaotic emergency, are best handled by **designated safety team members** who are trained and prepared, or by any member who can safely make the call. The NCSBI recommends clear **roles and responsibilities** outlined in the Emergency Action Plan (EAP), with law enforcement-trained individuals managing emergency response while clergy focus on spiritual support. [[ncsbi.gov](https://ncsbi.gov)], [[uua.org](https://uua.org)]

Yes, the pastor's visibility—naturally centered at the front of the congregation—can increase risk. That makes it even more important to **formalize support roles**: trained volunteers or security personnel handle tactical responsibilities while the pastor fulfills pastoral duties, minimizing overlap and personal risk.

A structured safety plan will:

- Assign tactical roles to **trained safety personnel** (e.g., evacuation, communication with first responders)
- Reserve **pastoral roles** for spiritual support, reassurance, and leadership during and after an incident.
- Enable the pastor to **step aside** from direct crisis intervention, reducing risk without diminishing their central role.

# FAQ's Continued

**How traumatic active shooter drills are for kids in schools has been a widely discussed issue. Could you speak to how churches have held drills/practices and raised this issue in a way that doesn't create a fearful atmosphere or another trauma?**

Churches can approach safety training in a way that is **trauma-informed, compassionate, and community-centered** by focusing on the following principles:

**1. Lead with Purpose and Reassurance**

- Clearly communicate that the goal of drills and discussions is to protect and care for the congregation, not to instill fear.
- Emphasize that preparedness is an act of love and stewardship, ensuring everyone, especially the most vulnerable, is safe.

**2. Use Trauma-Informed Language**

- Avoid graphic or alarming descriptions.
- Use calm, respectful language that acknowledges past trauma and emphasizes emotional safety.
- For example: "We're practicing how to respond in an emergency, just like we do with fire drills—not because we expect something to happen, but because we care about being ready."

**3. Offer Opt-In Participation**

- Allow individuals to choose their level of involvement. Some may prefer to observe rather than actively participate.
- Provide alternative sessions or quiet spaces for those who drills may trigger.

**4. Involve Mental Health and Pastoral Support**

- Have a pastor, counselor, or trauma-informed leader available during and after drills to support anyone who feels overwhelmed.
- Consider opening with a brief prayer or reflection to ground the experience in faith and community.

**5. Focus on Empowerment, Not Fear**

- Frame drills as a way to build confidence and resilience, not as a reaction to fear.
- Highlight the strengths of the community and the importance of looking out for one another.

**6. Debrief and Listen**

- After any drill or safety discussion, hold a gentle debrief session where people can share thoughts or concerns.
- Use this feedback to improve future sessions and ensure everyone feels heard and supported.

**Should churches lock doors once worship begins?**

Locking doors during worship can be a **helpful safety measure**, but it should be part of a **broader, well-considered security plan**. Here are key points to consider:

**Potential Benefits**

**Limits access** to unauthorized individuals once services begin.

- **Buys time** in the event of a threat, especially if doors are reinforced or can be quickly locked.
- Helps staff and volunteers **monitor entry points** more effectively.

**Potential Concerns**

- It may **create a barrier** for latecomers or emergency responders.
- It could **increase anxiety** among congregants if not communicated clearly.
- It might **trap people inside** if evacuation is needed and doors are not easily unlocked.

**Best Practices**

- 1. Use controlled access:** Lock exterior doors but keep one monitored entrance open with a trained greeter or security volunteer.
- 2. Communicate clearly:** Let the congregation know why doors are locked and how they can still enter safely.
- 3. Equip doors with quick-release mechanisms:** Ensure locked doors can be easily opened from the inside in case of emergency.
- 4. Train staff and volunteers:** Make sure those responsible for security know how to respond quickly and calmly.
- 5. Include this in drills:** Practice scenarios where doors are locked and ensure everyone knows what to do.

# FAQ's Continued

## Does having a person or member of the congregation with a gun help or hurt the situation?

This is a question that comes up frequently in today's climate, and understandably so. There isn't a universally right or wrong answer—it ultimately depends on the values, comfort level, and policies of each congregation.

It's important to recognize that simply having an armed individual present does not automatically serve as a deterrent. In fact, without proper training, clear guidelines, and coordination with church leadership and local law enforcement, an armed congregant could unintentionally escalate the situation or pose additional risks.

If a congregation chooses to allow armed individuals, it should be part of a **comprehensive safety strategy** that includes vetting, training, and clearly defined roles. The goal should always be to enhance safety—not to create confusion or unintended harm.

### Potential Benefits of Armed Congregants

#### Faster Intervention

- A 2025 analysis by the Crime: legally armed civilians often stop shootings before law enforcement arrives, cutting death and injury rates by about 49% compared to situations without civilian intervention.

#### Risks & Concerns

- Training & Readiness
  - Civilians typically lack the rigorous training of professionals. An armed presence without clear training standards can introduce risks.

#### Policy & Coordination Challenges

- Without strict protocols (e.g., weapons access, roles, communication), armed individuals may complicate responses or create liability issues.

#### Perception & Anxiety

- Visible firearms can heighten anxiety or give a false sense of security among congregants.

## Is it worth having a uniformed and armed police officer onsite during worship?

It is safer and more effective to have trained, licensed law enforcement or professional armed security manage church safety. These professionals are certified and trained in active shooter response, sharing the responsibility and liability for safety. This ensures that any threats are handled decisively and in coordination with emergency services.