

## A4: To survive a shooting<sup>1</sup>

This section from the award-winning *Disaster Handbook* is offered as a public service by the author in hopes that it may save a few lives somewhere someday. You may download it at the book's website, <http://thedisasterhandbook.com>

On June 11, 2014, President Barack Obama spoke at the White House about the latest string of senseless shootings that had recently occurred across America. He said, “Our levels of gun violence are off the charts. We don't have enough tools right now to really make as big a dent as we need to.”<sup>2</sup>

Here is a tool with which you can make a dent. Please read it carefully, so you will be better prepared if you are suddenly within range of a shooter. Feel free to copy the pages of this section and share it with your friends, and you can download for free a .pdf file of this section at this book's website, <http://thedisasterhandbook.com>, and email it to your friends—and maybe together we can quell some of this senseless violence.

As a grisly sample of this savagery, one morning in December 2012, Adam Lanza took (some reporters said stole) a .223-caliber Bushmaster rifle, a 10mm Glock handgun, and a 9mm Sauer handgun from his mother—a gun enthusiast who legally owned at least four more firearms and 1,400 rounds of ammunition—and after shooting and killing her in their home drove five miles to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, where he fired 156 shots in five minutes that killed 26 people.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever your opinion is of gun control, it is undebatable that shooters usually go where people are unarmed. If you are disinclined to wear a gun in public where happenstance could throw you in the path of a bullet, here are a few directives that could lengthen your life.

Your first steps toward protecting yourself should be *prevention* and *preparation*, as follows.

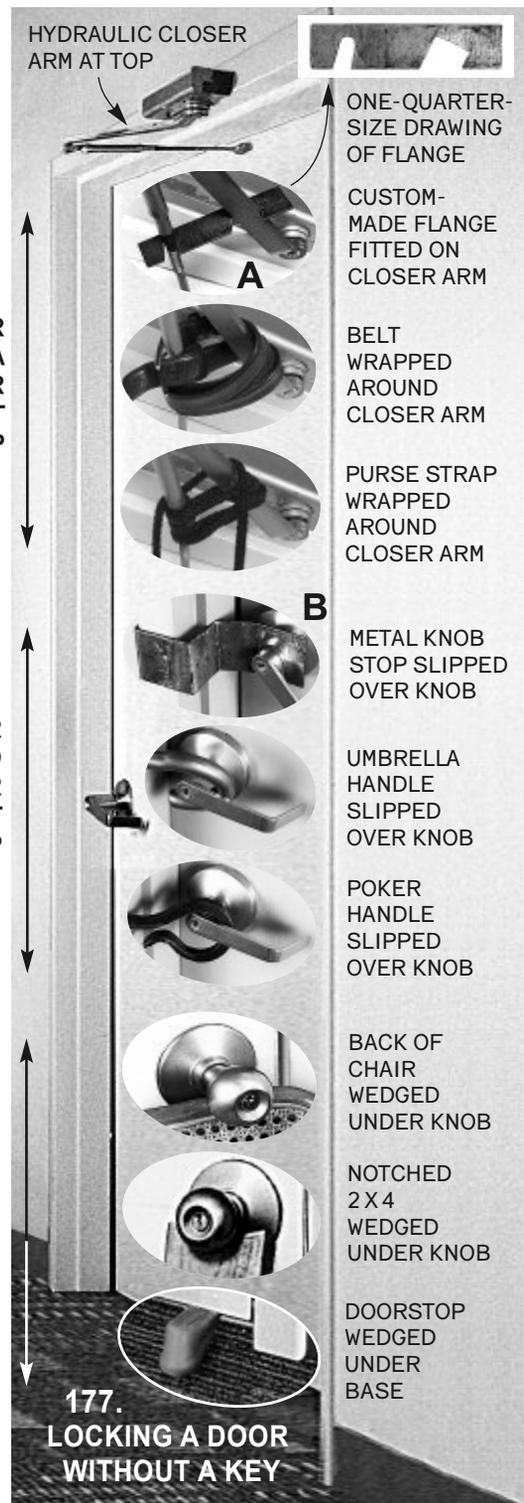
Regarding *prevention*, at the risk of being considered nosy or intrusive, report any strange or obsessive behavior by anyone you know or hear about. Shooters often mention or reveal their plans in advance, not so much to brag or show off but to vent their resentments and because their minds are obsessed with such thoughts. After Adam Lanza's rampage, authorities found in his home videos relating to the Columbine High School massacre and other mass murders as well as a 4-by-7-foot spreadsheet listing 500 mass murderers and the weapons they used which must have taken him years to compile. It would have been nice if somebody—like the mother he murdered—had reported this aberrant behavior to an authority.

Regarding *preparation*, in any shopping area, theater, school, workplace, or other public place you regularly inhabit, ask the management what lockdown procedures the premises has. Know how the doors are locked, where people can quickly hide or escape, how the police would be called, and similar details. In any such place, *know how to escape from where you are in at least two directions*. As you enter a lobby think, “If I hear gunshots here where would I go?” Look around. Remember at least two ways you can flee quickly. Do this with every space you pass through. Make it a habit. Some other precautions ...

 In a theater or at an athletic event, select a seat where you can escape quickly. A seat within three seats of an aisle is best. Before you sit down, note the exits. Trace your path from your seat to a safe place in

two directions. If you are in a bar or restaurant, sit with your back to a wall.

- ☞ At your place of work keep an emergency kit that includes water, energy bars and other quick foods, first-aid equipment, bathroom bucket, toiletries including toilet paper, and a change of clothes.
- ☞ Some say shine a bright flashlight in the killer's eyes — but I tested this and it doesn't work. In daylight or if any lights are on he'll still see you (the light will create a yellow after-image spot in his eyes), and in the dark he can't see you anyway so why turn a light on that reveals where you are?
- ☞ Find a way to hold the door closed to the room you work in, even if the door has a lock. *If the door swings out* and has a hydraulic closer arm at the top, you may be able to keep the door from opening more than a few inches by fitting a custom-made flange over the arms as appears at **A**. I made this for a friend's office; but it might not work if the door is pulled hard (I couldn't test this at my friend's office). Wrapping a belt or purse strap around the closer arm may also keep it from opening more than a few inches. If the door swings out and has no closer arm, you could fit a custom-made knob stop over the knob as appears at **B** on the right; or you could slip an umbrella handle, poker handle, or other hooked object over the knob to keep the shooter from opening it from the outside. *If the door swings in*, you could wedge a chair or a notched 2 x 4 under the knob, or a door stop under the base. Since there are many different kinds of doors, and since the perfect item might be lying around in your work area that you could use to secure your door, hopefully these possibilities will spur your imagination to create a simple, clever constrictor that will stymie a shooter from entering and killing you. Finally, test every method in advance to make sure it will work.



☞ Take a class in self-defense. Some police departments also offer crisis response training programs. Visit your town hall and ask if anything like this is available in your area. Test every idea they suggest to make sure it works.

Now for the tough part. If you hear gunshots inside a building you are in, quickly decide whether to **RUN**, **HIDE**, or **FIGHT**. You have two objectives: (1) Save your life, and (2) Slow the killer down so he has less time to shoot others before help arrives.

**RUN** as fast as you can away from the shooter if you safely can. This should be your first option because runners have the highest chance of survival in a shooting.

**HIDE** if you can't run away but can conceal yourself so the shooter can't see you or will have trouble finding you. Hiding includes barricading an entrance so the killer can't see or reach you. Barricade only if you can do so quickly.

**FIGHT** if the shooter is so close you can't run or hide, or you are responsible for the safety of others less able than you (as in a classroom of children). It's hard to write this, but if you're going to die anyway, do it in a way that will slow the killer as much as you can so he'll have less time to shoot others before the SWAT teams arrive. There's nothing worse you can do than cower helplessly in a corner while the killer mows you down with a few quick shots then moves swiftly to the next victim.

These three options are detailed below.

**RUN** ... If you hear shots, quickly determine their direction and flee the other way. *Don't freeze*—this is like signing your death warrant. Also ...

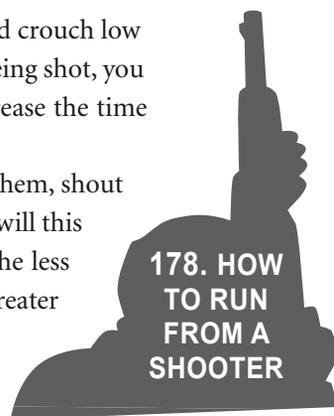
- ☞ *Take nothing with you* but your cellphone if you can snatch it quickly. You can always come back later. Crouch low below any windows you may pass so the shooter won't see you and possibly open fire on you. Once you are safe call 911 and give the location of the gunfire and any other information you have, but make your call short. Afterwards warn everyone you can to get away from the building.
- ☞ Run in a random zigzag pattern—not straight or uniformly zigzag—and crouch low to reduce your body target. Not only will you decrease your chances of being shot, you may increase the time the killer must aim to shoot you which may decrease the time he'll have to shoot others before the police arrive.
- ☞ Bring others if you safely can. If others look disoriented or scared, grab them, shout at them, slap them, whatever it takes, and bring them with you. Not only will this increase their chances of fleeing safely, the more people in your group the less likely any one person will be shot, and if you encounter a shooter your greater numbers will be more able to subdue him. Don't cluster—spread as wide as you can.



BETTER



178. HOW  
TO RUN  
FROM A  
SHOOTER



- ☞ If you see a fire extinguisher and have time to dismount and activate it, create a fog behind you so the shooter can't see you. If you can, spray him in the face then throw the extinguisher at his neck. There's no sense worrying about getting shot if it will happen anyway.
- ☞ If you are in a room with other people at ground level, think of breaking a window with a chair and helping others outside.

**HIDE** ... If you hear the killer approach and can't escape but he can't see you, crouch low behind a desk, under a table, in a closet, or other dark place and remain completely quiet—no whimpering or weeping that could betray your location. If you have time do the following:

- ☞ If you are in a room with a door, lock it if you can. If you have a doorstop, hardbacked chair, 2 x 6 of the right height, or any of the other earlier-mentioned objects, or heavy furniture like desks, tables, file cabinets, or photocopier is near the door, fit or slide them hard behind the door. Keep well to the side in case the killer tries to blast away the knob or shoot you through the door. Anything to slow him down and give him less time to shoot others before help arrives.
- ☞ Turn off any lights that are on, close any curtains or blinds, silence your cellphone, and make the room look as if no one is there. This will make it harder for the killer to see you, he'll be more afraid to enter, or he may think no one is there. Even if he does enter, if it is dark it will be harder to find anyone, and the more time he lingers is less time he can be elsewhere before help arrives.
- ☞ Call 911 if you can. Use a land line, not a cellphone, as then the police can trace where you are.
- ☞ Arm yourself with sharp-pointed or clublike weapons—pencils, pens, scissors, cup of hot coffee, umbrella, cane, a glass object you can break and brandish, a coat or jacket you can throw in the shooter's face.
- ☞ Stay close to the floor to offer the smallest target. Lie on against the back of the door to keep it closed.
- ☞ Wait until help arrives, even if it takes hours.

Here are a few tactics that saved lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School ...

- ☞ A six-year-old girl, the sole survivor in a first-grade class of 18, hid in a corner of the classroom's bathroom and remained still and played dead. She didn't move until the police found her.
- ☞ A school nurse hid under a desk in her office. The door opened and she saw Lanza's boots and legs facing her desk 20 feet away. He stood there a few seconds, then turned and left.
- ☞ A first-grade teacher hid 14 students in a bathroom, told them to be completely quiet, and barricaded the door. A piece of black construction paper covered a small window in the door of the classroom outside. When Landa walked past the door he apparently believed the room was vacant because the door was closed and the window was covered.
- ☞ Two librarians hid 18 children in a part of the library used for lockdowns in practice drills, then barricaded the door with a filing cabinet and led the children into a store room.
- ☞ A music teacher barricaded her fourth-graders in a small supply closet moments before Lanza pounded on the door and yelled, "Let me in!" When he heard nothing he left.
- ☞ A nurse hid in a first-aid supply closet for three hours before she believed it was safe to leave.

**FIGHT** ... If you come face to face with the shooter and are sure you will be shot if you do nothing, fight for your life. Even if you die, any way you can slow the killer down may reduce the number he kills elsewhere before the SWAT teams arrive. Also, most people who take a bullet today survive.

Here's something important to remember if you're ever shot. If the bullet misses your brain or your spinal cord, if you are extremely aggressive just before you are hit you will likely experience a spasm of shock for about two seconds *then you will become enraged and feel no pain as your body reflexively attacks the killer*. You may be mortally wounded, and you may bleed to death in twenty seconds—but in this time you may subdue the shooter and keep him from killing others. This is what happens if you are aggressive before the shot is fired—because your instincts are programmed to react this way. If your reaction is fear, when the shots are fired you will cower and fall.<sup>4</sup>

☞ Attack the shooter with any weapon you can find—pencils, ballpoint pens, scissors, piece of broken glass, umbrella, books and chairs and other objects you can throw. If you have a bladed instrument slice him across the forehead—he will immediately bleed copiously and his eyes will fill with blood and he won't be able to see. Some say kick him in the crotch—but unlike what Hollywood scripts say, unless you score a really hard perfect hit your assailant will only become more enraged. Stab him in the face, gouge his eyes, spray a fire extinguisher in his face, claw his face with your nails, grab the arm that holds the gun, throw a coat in his face, tackle him and hold onto his legs as hard as you can, if he wears a hood grab its rim and pull it down over his face. Butt him with your head and fight ferociously with both arms because while he holds the gun he has only one arm to ward you off. If you're lucky his gun may jam or he might have run out of bullets—then *he* will be the defenseless one!

☞ If others are with you, *all of you attack the killer at the same time!* He may shoot one or two of you which will be no worse than if you do nothing—but one of you may be able to tackle him, another can stomp on his face and neck, others can throw things at him, and someone can grab the gun.

Finally ... When the police arrive, do not run to them, as they might think you're a threat. Walk alertly with your arms held wide and your hands open, or with your hands on top of your head. Tell them everything you know. Do quickly what they order you to do.

Please feel free to share a pdf file or copies of this document with your friends. If you want to learn of other ways to protect yourself from disasters, visit the *Disaster Handbook's* website at <http://thedisasterhandbook.com>.

1. Much of this section's text is from <http://www.wikihow.com/Survive-a-School-or-Workplace-Shooting>. 2. "Obama Speaks of Frustrations After Oregon Shooting", Mark Landler and Lee van der Loo (*The New York Times*, Jun 11, 2014), page A12. 3. The information about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre is from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting). 4. The information about how a person reacts to a bullet wound is from an issue of *Handguns* magazine that I read in the early 1990s.