

Questions & Answers

Q & A with School Safety Expert Adam Coughran, MA



Adam Coughran, M.A., is the President and Co-Founder of Safe Kids Inc., which created the H.E.R.O. program, a curriculum designed to teach students how to implement four simple strategies when faced with violence: HIDE! ESCAPE! RUN! OVERCOME! Adam has nearly two decades of experience in law enforcement and is a former national active shooter instructor and current adjunct faculty member at several Southern California universities. Adam assembled a team of experts from law enforcement, education and other professions to help empower students, schools and communities to survive an active shooting or violent event.

Q: Following the most recent tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, what is your latest safety advice for school administrators? What are the typical failings of schools?

A: Active shooters represent a multi-dimensional threat and must be met with a

corresponding adaptable response. To provide a safe learning environment for their students, administrators need to have three pillars of safety embedded in the culture of their school/s:

- **Strong physical security measures:** Critical components include school resource officers, security guards, controlled access and video surveillance.
- **Training and education:** Students AND teachers need to be provided with strategies to help them react to violence, including drills, training programs and response policies.
- **Involved staff and student body:** A culture of awareness and preparation must be instilled in the student body. Faculty should be invested in the social-emotional wellbeing of students and be on the lookout for behavioral indicators of violence.

Q: What is your advice for teachers in the classroom?

A: We teach the H.E.R.O. response, which consists of four simple strategies that can be used to survive violence: HIDE! ESCAPE! RUN! OVERCOME! If a teacher is caught in a classroom when an active shooter incident breaks out, it's absolutely critical to lock all doors to the classroom and turn out the

lights. Next, a barricade should be constructed and curtains or other window coverings should be used to block the view inside the classroom. Desks and chairs can be piled in a tangled knot against the door to prevent the shooter from entering.

If the shooter begins to break through the door and barricade, teachers should help their students ESCAPE! through a window or into an adjoining classroom.

If there isn't an opportunity to escape, teachers and students should prepare to OVERCOME! the shooter. In the H.E.R.O. program, we don't encourage students to physically attack the shooter.

Instead, we encourage them to act as a team to yell, scream, and throw items at the shooter to distract them and break their psychological momentum. If the teacher is physically capable and confident, we do encourage them to physically OVERCOME! the shooter by any means necessary.

Q: In the current climate, what can they do to protect their students from a school shooter?

A: To protect our students, we must give them appropriate strategies to survive. Lockdown-only solutions are no longer considered the "Standard

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