Active Shooting Response

Active shooter incidents represent some of the most volatile and time-critical emergencies a telecommunicator will ever face. This course prepares learners to manage these high-stress situations through structured call-handling, informed decision-making, and effective communication under pressure.

It examines the psychology and mentality of active shooters, the telecommunicator's critical role in prevention and response, and communication techniques that save lives during an unfolding crisis. The course also addresses specialized incidents in schools, the management of post-incident stress, and strategies for long-term resilience and recovery. Through real-world examples, guided practice, and scenario-based learning, learners gain the confidence and competence to respond effectively when every second counts.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the characteristics and behavioral indicators of active shooter events to improve situational awareness and caller assessment.
2. Differentiate between types of active shooters and analyze their motives, mindset, and escalation factors to anticipate threat behaviors.
3. Apply structured call-handling techniques and communication strategies to manage callers, victims, and suspects during active shooter incidents.
4. Evaluate response and coordination strategies that promote responder safety, scene containment, and effective multi-agency communication.
5. Demonstrate empathy and control when communicating with shooters or emotionally unstable callers using Active Listening Skills and crisis intervention techniques.
6. Recognize the effects of critical incident stress on telecommunicators and implement appropriate self-care, peer support, and post-incident recovery measures.

Modules

Module 1: Overview

This module introduces the concept of an active shooter and the role of the telecommunicator during such high-intensity incidents. Learners explore the definition, characteristics, and common locations of active shooting events, as well as pre-planning strategies that improve coordination and reduce chaos during response efforts. Real-world examples and case videos emphasize the importance of accurate information gathering, caller differentiation, and situational awareness.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define the term “active shooter” and describe the behaviors associated with active shooting incidents.
2. Identify common target areas and potential perpetrators of active shooter incidents.
3. Explain the telecommunicator’s role in protecting responders and coordinating resources during an active shooting event.
4. Apply pre-planning principles to improve readiness, information sharing, and interagency collaboration.

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Content/Activities

- Video*: NIU Shooting Awards.* Demonstrates effective telecommunicator performance and response coordination during the Northern Illinois University incident.
- Video: *Active Shooting Incidents.* Explores real-world dynamics of shooter events and telecommunicator responsibilities.
- Brainteasers (5)**.** Multiple-choice questions reinforcing definitions of *active shooter*, typical target locations, perpetrator types, workplace warning signs, and pre-planning principles.

- Activity: How Can You Help? Scenario exercise prompting learners to assess telecommunicator priorities during an unfolding active shooter call.

Module 2: Mentality and Characteristics

This module explores the mindset, motivation, and behavioral traits of active shooters. Learners examine the psychological patterns that distinguish active shooters from other violent offenders, including fixation, grievance, and planning behaviors. The module also outlines the five phases of an active shooter's development, from fantasy through implementation and demonstrates how recognizing these patterns can aid in prevention, early intervention, and telecommunicator awareness..

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Differentiate the behavioral and emotional indicators that separate active shooters from other offenders.
2. Analyze motivational factors such as grievance, ideology, and mental instability that contribute to violent escalation.
3. Describe the five developmental phases of an active shooter and the observable behaviors linked to each stage.
4. Evaluate how early recognition of warning signs and mindset patterns can strengthen telecommunicator situational awareness and intervention.

Content/Activities

- Video: *Ohio School Shooting*. Highlights pre-incident behaviors and mental patterns that can signal intent to act.
- Video**:** *When Seconds Count.* Demonstrates how dispatch awareness of shooter intent and planning influences coordinated rapid response.
- Brainteasers (6): Multiple-choice questions that reinforce understanding of shooter psychology, FBI research findings, the five phases of active-shooter behavior, IARD concepts, and key early-warning indicators.

- Activity: Drag and Drop Exercise. Interactive scenario connecting obsessive beliefs to the development of violent intent.

Module 3: The Telecommunicators Role

This module focuses on the telecommunicator's responsibilities during an active shooting incident, emphasizing calm, structured information gathering and effective coordination with responding officers. Learners review the use of the Journalistic Investigative Approach (5W + H + W + H + I), the importance of intelligence gathering, call management under stress, and Pre-Arrival Instructions that prioritize caller and responder safety. The content also reinforces professionalism under pressure and the telecommunicator's critical influence on scene safety and outcome.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Demonstrate calm, confident communication that supports caller reassurance and responder coordination during high-stress incidents.
2. Apply structured questioning using the 5W + H + W + H + I model to gather precise scene information and ensure accurate dispatch.
3. Assess caller safety and environmental risks to develop appropriate Pre-Arrival Instructions and situational guidance.
4. Evaluate scenarios that risk operational complacency, such as the 300 Call Syndrome, and describe strategies to maintain vigilance and consistency under pressure.

Content/Activities

- Video: *Navy Yard Shooting.* Illustrates the importance of pre-entry intelligence and information flow between telecommunicators and law enforcement.
- Video**:** *RUN, HIDE, FIGHT.* Demonstrates tactical survival guidance and the dispatcher's role in relaying public-safety messaging.
- Activity: Structured Call-Handling Simulation. Learners practice applying the Journalistic Investigative Approach in different caller scenarios to refine questioning skills.

- Brainteasers (6): Multiple-choice questions that reinforce structured questioning, caller-safety assessment, Pre-Arrival Instructions, situational awareness, and the principles of 300 Call Syndrome.

Module 4: Active Shooting Incidents in Schools

This module focuses on the unique challenges of responding to active shooter incidents in educational settings. Learners review the principles of school safety planning, emergency preparedness, and threat mitigation within K–12 and higher education environments. The content reinforces the telecommunicator's role in preparedness, prevention, and response coordination by exploring warning signs, containment procedures, and communication barriers specific to school incidents.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify key components of school safety plans and explain how they mitigate active shooter threats.
2. Analyze the five mission areas of school emergency preparedness—prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery—and evaluate their relationship to 911 operations.
3. Assess best practices for coordinating preparedness exercises and integrating community partners such as law enforcement, fire services, and emergency management.
4. Apply communication strategies that ensure effective alerts, evacuation coordination, and assistance for individuals with disabilities or Limited English Proficiency (LEP).
5. Evaluate behavioral warning signs and escalation indicators among potential student shooters to promote early intervention and effective caller assessment.

Content/Activities

- Video*: Santa Barbara Shooting – Who Was Elliot Rodger?* Explores behavioral escalation, pre-attack indicators, and public warning signs common among student attackers.

- Brainteasers (5)**.** Multiple-choice and multiple-response questions that reinforce knowledge of school safety policies, emergency plan components, five mission areas, containment procedures, and imminent warning signs of potential shooters.
- Activity: School Safety Review. Learners match school preparedness terms including mitigation, response, recovery, to their correct descriptions based on the U.S. Department of Education's emergency operations guide.

Module 5: Communicating with the Active Shooter

This module focuses on communication strategies for telecommunicators who may find themselves in direct contact with an active shooter. Learners explore the psychology of crisis communication, the purpose and methods of crisis intervention, and the structured use of Active Listening Skills. The module reinforces the importance of empathy, emotional labeling, and rapport-building techniques that help defuse tension, buy time, and preserve life in volatile situations.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Differentiate between expressive (emotional) and instrumental (goal-oriented) behavior patterns displayed by active shooters to inform the communication strategy.
2. Apply crisis intervention principles to manage high-intensity interactions and stabilize caller behavior through empathy and control.
3. Demonstrate the use of Active Listening Skills, including emotion labeling, paraphrasing, reflecting, and minimal encouragers to build rapport and gain intelligence.
4. Analyze the dynamics of hostage situations that may evolve during active shootings and identify key negotiation conditions that promote de-escalation and surrender.
5. Evaluate the crisis negotiator's ultimate goal during active shooter incidents involving hostages, focusing on safety, containment, and time management.

Content/Activities

- Video: *School Clerk Helps Shooting Suspect Surrender.* Demonstrates calm, empathetic communication and the effectiveness of rapport-building under life-threatening circumstances.
- Video: *Married to a School Shooter.* Depicts the emotional complexity and desperation of a hostage taker, highlighting negotiation principles and containment strategies.
- Brainteasers (5): Multiple-choice questions that reinforce the goals of crisis intervention, identify key active listening skills, test understanding of hostage negotiation prerequisites, and define the role of the crisis negotiator during ongoing incidents.
- Activity: Active Listening Simulation. Learners practice applying emotion labeling, paraphrasing, and "I" messages in realistic shooter or hostage caller scenarios.

Module 6: Critical Incident Stress

This module addresses the emotional, psychological, and physical effects that critical incidents have on telecommunicators and other public safety professionals. Learners explore the characteristics of trauma, the symptoms of stress reactions, and best practices for self-care and peer support following an active shooter or other high-impact event. The module reinforces the importance of early recognition, structured debriefing, and organizational support to promote recovery and resilience.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define what constitutes a critical incident and describe its potential emotional and operational impact on telecommunicators.
2. Identify immediate needs of public safety personnel following an active shooting or other traumatic event and the importance of structured debriefing.
3. Explain the principles of trauma-related stress and how unresolved trauma can influence current coping capacity.
4. Recognize common physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms associated with critical incident stress.
5. Apply the foundational elements of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) to support post-incident recovery among peers.

Content/Activities

- Video: *Critical Incident Response and Debriefing.* Illustrates the effects of cumulative trauma and the role of debriefings in restoring resilience.
- Activity: Stress-Symptom Mapping. Learners categorize real-world reactions into physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive groups to identify early warning signs.
- Brainteasers (4): Multiple-choice questions that reinforce the definition of a critical incident, the immediate aftermath needs, the concept that trauma is a normal response to an abnormal event, and the key principles of CISD.

Course Completion Criteria

To successfully complete this course and earn continuing education hours, learners must achieve a minimum score of 75%. The quiz must be completed within one hour.

- CE Hours awarded: 2
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

- Desktop, laptop, or mobile device
- Speakers or headphones
- High-speed Internet access
- A current web browser