

# Active Shooter Exercises

## Self-care for Participants



*Participating in a mock drill or exercise can be exciting and challenging, particularly if you have a specific role to play, such as a perpetrator, victim, or responder. It can also become very stressful and intense. Although you consciously know that the event is not real, your body is hard-wired to respond to danger in very specific ways. As a result, it is possible for your body to react as if the event were real. This can be particularly true if you have gone through a traumatic event in the past.*

*Whatever your role, it is important to remember that you can have very common and normal stress reactions as you go through the exercise.*

Advice for workers who must continue to function following a drill:

- Try to pace yourself and pace your decisions. Consider courses of action (i.e. avoid snap decisions that may have to be changed).
- Take breaks when possible and relax using ways that have helped in the past.
- Rest and relax off of your feet when there are opportunities.
- Identify a trusted co-worker to bounce ideas off and serve as a buddy (i.e. someone to look after you.)
- If you must continue to work immediately after participating in a drill limit tobacco use and excessive “junk” food and unnecessary driving are particularly important.
- Do not overwork. Trust others to help and get the job done.

If you have questions or concerns about your reaction to the drill, please contact:

### References:

Center for the study of Traumatic Stress (2013). *Recovery in the Aftermath of Workplace Violence: Guidance for Workers*. Retrieved from [www.usuhs.mil/scts/](http://www.usuhs.mil/scts/).

American Psychological Association (2014). *Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting*. Retrieved from [www.apa.org/helpcenter/mass-shooting.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/mass-shooting.aspx)

National Sleep Foundation (2013). *Sleep Hygiene*. Retrieved from [www.sleepfoundation.org/article/ask-the-expert/sleep-hygiene](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/ask-the-expert/sleep-hygiene).

### **Common reactions to stress can include:**

- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Sweating
- Chills
- Upset stomach
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Headache
- Heightened startle response

*Because of the potential for experiencing a stress response, it is important that you take care of yourself before, during, and after the drill.*

#### ***Prepare before the drill***

- *Take several deep breaths*
- *Take a moment to become aware of the sights, sounds, and smells around you*
- *Slowly eat or drink something, paying attention to the taste, texture, smell, and sensation on your tongue*
- *Connect with those around you*
- *Remind yourself that it is normal to experience some anxiety and stress as you participate in the exercise*

#### ***Practice during the drill***

- *Breathe deeply*
- *Drink plenty of liquids*
- *Take breaks when possible*
- *Ground yourself in the here and now by identifying 5 objects that you see, 5 things you smell, five sensations against you skin.*
- *Use humor*
- *If it becomes too overwhelming – step out (you are more important than the exercise)*

### ***Restore yourself after the drill***

- *Talk about it – take time to debrief with other participants and staff. Talk to your friends/family.*
- *Pay attention to what your body is telling you – are you feeling exhausted or sore? Are there stress points such as in your neck, back, or knees?*
- *Honor your feelings – it is common to have many emotions after participating in a drill*
- *Do something fun and relaxing with family or friends*
- *Exercise*
- *Eat a healthy meal*
- *Get plenty of rest*
- *Engage in normal routines and activities*

### **Possible longer term impact**

Chances are that you will recover quickly from the stress of the exercise, particularly if you practice some basic self-care. However, it is possible that you could experience some longer term consequences. Common responses are often involuntary and spontaneous. They are hard-wired in the brain and can include:

- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Getting angry, overreacting, and trying to fight off problems or becoming aggressive towards others.
- Withdrawing from social interaction
- Difficulty concentrating, staying focused, and making decisions
- Change in normal activities or routines
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances
- Physical symptoms such as stomach aches or headaches

Again, with proper self-care and the support of others these reactions will normally decrease over time. However, *if symptoms persist or worsen, or if you begin to have thoughts of suicide, please reach out to your doctor or the contact provided to drill participants.*