

SURVIVING HOSTAGE INCIDENTS



SECURE COMMUNITY NETWORK

A hostage incident is a situation in which one or more armed individuals hold one or more people against their will, under threat of injury or death, with the intent of using them as leverage to get or gain something of benefit.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

IN THE BEGINNING:

The first 15 to 45 minutes of a hostage incident are among the most dangerous because emotions, fear, and adrenaline are very high. Everyone, including the hostage taker(s), is in a crisis state.

1. If safe to do so, call or text 911 with a description of the hostage taker(s) or activate a duress alarm system if available to notify authorities of the critical incident.
2. Understand that the only aspect of a crisis we have absolute control over is our emotions.
 - A. Deep breathing can help.
 - B. Calm is contagious!
3. Recognize that the hostage taker(s) is in control.
 - A. Follow their commands.
 - B. Speak only when spoken to.
 - C. Listen attentively.
4. Do not call unnecessary attention to yourself.
5. Generally, do NOT attempt to disarm the hostage taker.
6. Time is your friend. Prolonging the event may reduce emotions, allowing for rational thought to increase for both you and the hostage taker(s).
7. If in imminent danger of death or serious physical injury, you have the legal right to defend yourself or another. If you decide to act, COMMIT TO ACTION!





DURING THE INCIDENT:

Crisis negotiators will attempt to draw out the duration of an incident if doing so would de-escalate the situation. Prepare yourself mentally. Start developing a “survival mindset” now!

1. Maintain “a middle of the road” stance with your actions and behavior. Be respectful. Think “Goldilocks” (not too hot, not too cold, etc.).
2. Humanize yourself. Use first names, be a good active listener, do not judge. Make sure to face the person so they see your face. Look for “hooks” into their life and ways you can connect (pets, children, etc.).
3. Be a good witness. Stay alert and pay attention to details and your surroundings (e.g., description of subject(s), weapons, possible escape routes and safest locations to move if the situation deteriorates, possible improvised weapons). If you are released or you escape, you can help authorities with information.
4. Recognize that lying to or deceiving the hostage taker(s) is extremely dangerous.
5. A survival mindset means you decide you will survive. Make sure to eat if offered food to maintain physical and mental strength. Try and get some exercise and keep a routine if the incident is prolonged. If more than one hostage, stay together in groups.

AT THE RESOLUTION OF THE INCIDENT:

Potential outcomes of a hostage incident include your release or escape, surrender of the hostage taker(s), and tactical intervention by law enforcement.



IF YOU ARE RELEASED OR THE SUSPECT SURRENDERS, MAKE SURE TO:

- A. Keep your hands empty and visible. Law enforcement may not have all information you do. They will be looking for threats.
- B. Follow the commands of law enforcement.
- C. Move slowly. Quick movements are dangerous to law enforcement and reduce their ability to evaluate intentions.
- D. Be a good witness. You will be asked later for important information during the hostage incident.



WHEN THINKING ABOUT ESCAPE:

- E. The act of escaping is extremely dangerous as it will create high emotion and anxiety for everyone involved; rational thought will plummet.
- F. Think TWICE! If you fail, what will happen to you? What will happen to other hostages? If you succeed, what will happen to other hostages?
- G. If you believe you must escape and will be successful, COMMIT TO ACTION!



TACTICAL INTERVENTION

- H. Tactical intervention is action taken by law enforcement to end the threat posed by the hostage taker and rescue hostages.
- I. Expect to be startled or scared during tactical entry.
- J. Your life is in danger! Along with the first 15-45 minutes, this is the most dangerous time during a hostage incident.
- K. GO TO THE FLOOR! Law enforcement will try to locate and engage the hostage taker. Help them identify the suspect by laying down immediately!
- L. Keep your hands visible and empty. Putting them on your head is helpful.
- M. Follow all commands from law enforcement. They will need time to identify and sort out “who is who.”