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## Crime Blog

### Would you know what to do in a mass shooting? Dallas police offer survival tips



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Dallas police Officer Dave Wilson teaches a mass shooting survival class at J. Erik Jonsson Central Library on Friday, Dec. 11, 2015, in Dallas. (Jae S. Lee/The Dallas Morning News)

Would you know what to do if a gunman opened fire at your office, in a movie theater or at the mall?

That's the question police want the public to consider in the wake of increasingly common mass shootings, such as recent ones in

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So Dallas police offer civilians free survival training. An unfortunate reality, they say.

“I wish we didn’t have to do this,” Officer G. Dave Wilson said Friday as he taught the course for library employees. “But the fact of the matter is we don’t live in the same world I was born in.”

In a conference room at the downtown J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, Wilson addressed about 50 employees and showed them an instructional video by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“Number one: They’re all crazy,” Wilson said of the gunmen.

It’s important to scope out exits when entering a public place, Wilson said, because shootings happen suddenly and require quick thinking. They are often over within five to 15 minutes. When gunfire breaks out, get low and run for the exits in a zig-zag pattern, he said.



Dallas Police Officer Dave Wilson, left, shows a self defense move with Peter Coyl, District Manager of the Dallas Public Library. (Jae S. Lee/The Dallas Morning News)

If the exit is blocked, or moving that way would make you more vulnerable, hide, Wilson said. Hide in a closet, a conference room, or behind a door. Silence your phone and turn out the lights.

If you can’t run or hide, Wilson told the class they should fight as a last resort. He taught them ways to use a pen, fire extinguisher and other improvised weapons to target key spots such as the shooter’s eyes, nose and throat.

“As far as I know, we get one chance in life and I got stuff I want to do,” Wilson said. “I’m going to fight.”

Some experts, however, caution against fighting back.

“Too many programs are telling citizens to engage the offender and there is absolutely zero research behind that,” said John Matthews, a former Dallas police officer who wrote the 2013 book *Mass Shootings: Six Steps for Survival*.

Matthews said he has analyzed 73 mass shootings in the U.S. since the 1980s. None of them were stopped by a single civilian. In most cases when people tried to attack the shooter, that led to them being shot, sometimes execution-style, he said.

Matthews said people should only try to attack the shooter as a last resort, ideally with at least two other people and weapons. They should strike when the gunman is focused on something besides shooting, such as reloading the weapon.

Don’t plead for your life, Matthews added, because that plays into the shooter’s desire for control and usually leads to execution.

Playing dead is surprisingly successful, Matthews said. That worked for several survivors, he said, including some who

survived the shootings at a church in Charleston, S.C., and at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Ore.

The library associates at Friday's training in Dallas said they found the session helpful yet scary.

"It's clear we have issues as a country," said Ana Niño, 22. "There's no place you can be safe anymore."

Courtney Woods, 50, said the class was "very needed." She was glad to refresh her tactical skills that have gotten rusty since she left the Army 20 years ago.

"I feel more empowered now," said Renita Brown, 65. "Every business and establishment should have this training."

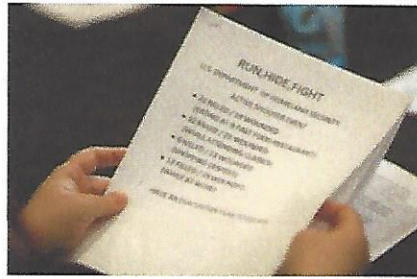
To schedule a free survival training session, contact Officer Wilson at [gerald.wilson@dpd.ci.dallas.tx.us](mailto:gerald.wilson@dpd.ci.dallas.tx.us).

*Twitter: @NaomiMartin*

#### **Tips to survive a mass shooting:**

- Exit immediately. Recognize the gunfire's real — not a drill or fireworks. Call 911 once you're in a safe place and provide the specific location and description of the shooter.
- Seek cover behind any large objects or doors. Ideally find a conference room or closet, turn your phone on silent and turn out the lights.
- Conceal yourself. Consider playing dead if you're in an open area with other bodies on the floor and running would make you a target.
- Assess the situation constantly. If the shooter moves away from the door, take the opportunity to exit.
- Present a small target. Get low to the ground.
- Engage the shooter only as a last resort, ideally with at least two other people and weapons, and strike when the shooter is focused on a non-shooting activity, such as reloading the weapon.

*Source: John Matthews, author of Mass Shootings: Six Steps for Survival*



A participant looks through a handout at a training class taught by Dallas Police Officer Dave Wilson at J. Erik Jonsson Central Library on Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (Jae S. Lee/The Dallas Morning News)