



TOOLS OF  
EMPOWERMENT

PHOTO COURTESY IVY SCHAMIS

## Tools of Empowerment: A Mass Shooting Survivor's Perspective on Preparation

BY IVY SCHAMIS

Dear educators, administrators, and stakeholders in the realm of private higher education,

My name is Ivy Schamis and I survived a mass shooting in my classroom. I taught Social Studies at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida for almost two decades. Parkland is a residential town with a close-knit community where I raised my children, and we all thought it was the safest place to live and go to school. Until it wasn't.

On Valentine's Day, 2018, a former student managed to get into the school through an unlocked fence, brandishing a tote bag with an assault rifle inside. He made his way to the building where he began his ambush of innocent, unsuspecting students and teachers.

Seconds after my juniors, seniors, and I heard gunshots in the hallway, the gunman was shooting through a glass panel in my classroom door aiming at anything and everything inside. The students and I crouched low to the ground, trying to protect ourselves and

each other. We were totally unprepared. We never had an active shooter drill. We never had stop-the-bleed training. There was a shooter with a gun, and we had nothing to protect ourselves.

As we approach the solemn 5th anniversary of the Parkland MSDS shooting February 14th, it is incumbent upon us to reflect on the past, assess the present, and diligently strive to fortify the safety of our academic sanctuaries. It is imperative that each of you embrace a multifaceted approach to campus

security, drawing on a range of tools and strategies to create a resilient shield against potential threats.

In the quest for enhanced safety, I would urge all campuses to consider investing in advanced surveillance systems and artificial intelligence-driven threat detection. These technologies offer a proactive means of identifying and responding to potential risks, providing an invaluable layer of security. Establishing robust communication systems, such as mass notification platforms and real-time update apps, ensures that critical information reaches everyone, especially professors and staff, swiftly during emergencies. This offers time to prepare for the DHS response protocol of "Run. Hide. Fight," and for leaders on campus to initiate safety procedures in a timely manner.

Ballistic protection tools like Hardwire Emergency Response Shields (ERS) are tangible assets. Much like fire extinguishers are staples for any safety-conscious environment, these shields serve as mobile

tools, providing physical barriers against gunfire until help arrives, or as supportive tools if first responders do not have the proper equipment on hand to execute their response protocol. While policy change works its way through our legal system, there are tools like these available to protect where before there was nothing. Having these shields available is part of a broader strategy to fortify our educational institutions and create a deterrent as assailants tend to zero in on soft targets. It cannot be stressed enough how important this tangible ballistic protection aspect is to a holistic active-shooter safety plan.

At a time when I had nothing, when my students had only a textbook to shield themselves, something that could stop bullets in real time could have been a gamechanger for the survival of my class. The ERS, paired with other tools like window film, locked doors, and key card entry in a layered defense, could help buy precious time. Window film is a

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wonderful tool that keeps glass from shattering when shot. This delays the entry of the intruder, creates more decision space, and offers time to inform emergency responders before an assailant can enter the building. Preventative security measures like window film and locks are great additions to a holistic approach in slowing the progress of an assailant, but when it comes down to the wire and victims are faced with an active shooter, a bulletproof shield is worth its weight in gold.

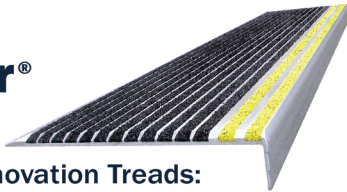
Fostering a culture of preparedness is equally crucial. Regular emergency response drills and simulations acclimate students

and staff to effective procedures, reducing panic, and promoting a coordinated response in times of crisis. Inform your community of security updates and tools available for emergency situations. Collaborating with local law enforcement agencies to conduct a thorough threat assessment, share information about potential risks, and plan joint emergency response drills further strengthens our defenses. When everyone is on the same page—staff, students, and law enforcement—there is a greater chance of fluidity in response protocol and ultimately survival. There is strength in numbers when everyone knows what to do, where to go, what

*continued...*



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the vulnerabilities are, and how to utilize tools they have at their disposal.

Being vocal about your school's security measures also acts as a deterrent for assailants. A hardened target is less appealing to those

who wish to do harm. For example, the New York Police Department (NYPD) used to suffer frequent casualties from officers being assassinated in their vehicles. Once the NYPD started armoring their vehicles, the attacks stopped. Criminals would not even attempt

to shoot the police vehicles because they knew it would be of no use. There was common knowledge that attacking officers within their vehicles was ineffective. This model of prevention can also be applied to higher education campuses: having visible protection like cameras, shields hung on walls around campus, signs, and surveillance monitors where people can see themselves entering a space creates an intimidation factor that can keep assailants at bay.

In addition to physical security measures, prioritizing mental health and emotional well-being cannot be overstated. Providing access to counseling services, fostering a sense of community, and promoting mental health awareness contribute to a campus culture that values the well-being of every individual.

As we remember the lives lost at Parkland MSDS, let us honor their memory through action. By embracing a holistic approach to campus security, integrating cutting-edge technologies, fostering preparedness, and prioritizing mental health, we can create an environment where education thrives without fear. It is time for each of us to actively contribute to the creation of a secure and nurturing space for learning.

In unity and commitment,  
Ivy Schamis



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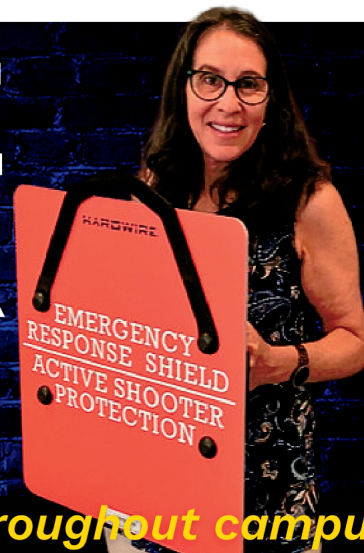
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ivy Schamis is a former teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and is a survivor of the mass shooting that took the lives of 17 people in 2018.

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*"Being a survivor of a mass shooting in my classroom, I understand the necessity of feeling safe in school. There is a fundamental need to be protected and knowing that I have the safety of the Hardwire Emergency Response Shield gives me a sense of security I didn't have before."*

-Ivy Schamis, Teacher and Survivor of Parkland, FL - MSDS

## The "Fire Extinguisher for Gunfire" is available: Hardwire's Emergency Response Shield (ERS).

In recent years, the escalating threat of gun violence has become an alarming concern for educational institutions across the United States. With mass shootings on the rise, it is imperative for private higher educational institutions to proactively address the safety of their staff and students. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, a comprehensive and immediate solution is essential. One such solution gaining traction is the implementation of Emergency Response Shields (ERS), a proactive measure designed to protect against active shooter incidents on campus.

### Ensuring Immediate Protection:

Just as fire safety protocols have been ingrained into the infrastructure of public buildings, a similar approach is crucial for addressing active shooter scenarios in private educational institutions. The ERS serves as the "Fire Extinguisher for Gunfire," offering immediate protection against assault rifles, shotguns, handguns, as well as blades and blunt force weapons. By empowering faculty and staff with this advanced tool, private higher educational institutions can bridge the gap between an incident occurring and the arrival of first responders.

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### Aligning with Best Practices:

The ERS aligns seamlessly with established safety protocols recommended by authoritative bodies such as the Department of Homeland Security's Active Shooter Preparedness Program (Run, Hide, Fight) and the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) principles (Avoid, Deny, Defend). This integration ensures that the use of defensive measures is in accordance with nationally recognized standards, maximizing the effectiveness of emergency response strategies.

### Derived from Military-Grade Technology:

The technology behind Emergency Response Shields is derived from armor technologies initially developed for Department of Defense Programs and extensively fielded on United States military vehicles. These advancements have been integrated into federal law enforcement body armor, assuring a high level of protection for educational institutions against potential threats.

### Creating a Secure Learning Environment:

Beyond the immediate safety benefits, the implementation of ERS has shown to contribute significantly to mental health and well-being within educational communities. As students and staff feel empowered and protected, a renewed sense of security and confidence permeates the campus environment. The visible presence of protective measures can also act as a deterrent, dissuading potential attackers from targeting well-prepared and armored educational institutions.

In the face of increasing threats, private higher educational institutions must prioritize the safety and security of their campuses. Emergency Response Shields offer a proactive and effective solution, aligning with established safety protocols and utilizing cutting-edge military-grade technology. By investing in these defensive measures, institutions can foster a secure learning environment, providing both students and staff with the confidence that their safety is a top priority.