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A couple years ago when I was working as a counselor up in Lamoille County, I had the opportunity to participate in a training on the ALICE model, which is an options-based response to active shooter situations.

Though the training wasn't all that relevant to my work at the time, it did shift the way I thought about school safety. I have a step daughter who attends Berlin Elementary School. This training made me realize how vulnerable she would be there if an active shooter situation were to unfold, given that they- and most other schools in Vermont- seem to still be practicing a lockdown-only response to active shooter situations.

I'm here today because ever since the Parkland shooting, the focus of news headlines has been on gun laws, high tech security measures in schools, and mental health interventions. Maybe I missed something, but it seems like what isn't being covered, is how we can train our kids and our teachers to survive an active shooter situation. That's what I learned during the ALICE training, and I want to share a bit of that knowledge with you today in the hopes that you might dig a little deeper after I leave.

Let's talk ALICE. Please note that I shamelessly stole some of this language directly from the ALICE website, which you'll find at alicetraining.com.

ALICE is an options-based strategy that aims to increase survivability in the case of a violent intruder attack, in places like schools. The goal of the model is to empower people, including kids, teens, and teachers, to survive. This type of model has been proven to be much more effective at saving lives than the traditional lockdown typically used in schools.

ALICE is an acronym for elements that describe options you have in an active shooter event as well as other important action steps to remember.

Your options in an active shooter situation are to escape, lockdown, or counter.

Escaping is the best option, as it removes you from the source of danger completely. The ALICE training walks participants through how to escape efficiently- including how to break through a window without hurting yourself. Through this training, school administrators also learn how to establish rally points for students and staff to run to, as well as pick up areas for parents to get their children once they are out of harm's way.

The next best option is to lock down. The ALICE lockdown is NOT the typical lockdown taught in most schools, where students go to a predetermined corner of the room, crouch under a table, turn off the lights, and lock the door- which, by the way was a tactic created to safeguard kids against driveby shooters, not shooters in a school itself. Instead, the ALICE lockdown I learned involved barricading inside a room. During the training I participated in, I actually practiced this with a group of people- just like students and teachers would if their school implemented the ALICE model. We learned how to use materials we had available, like belts, books, shelves, filing cabinets, you name it- to make it so no one could come through the door. We practiced that part too- with several participants trying to slam their way through the barricades we made. No one could get through. This kind of lockdown would buy students time to call police or plan escape routes through windows if needed.

If escaping or locking down with barricades are not available options, the next option is to counter. I know this is a scary option, but picture this scenario. Students are walking through a packed hallway and one of their classmates opens fire right there. If I'm the student right next to the shooter, I want to know the skills to get away without being hurt. Counter in this instance means to create noise, movement, distance, and distraction with the intent of reducing the shooter's ability to shoot accurately. It does NOT mean fighting. Creating a dynamic environment decreases the shooter's chance of hitting a target, and can buy time so people can escape. Countering is the strategy of last resort. I know this is a horrible picture, but imagine a shooter aiming at a group of kids huddled under a table, not moving. Then imagine a group of kids running, screaming, and throwing objects from every direction. In which scenario would that shooter have a greater chance of making contact with a student?

Other elements of the ALICE model are alerting and informing.

Alerting happens when you are first notified of danger. The way a school alerts its staff and students is one of the most essential elements to keeping people safe. The sooner you know you're in danger, the sooner you can figure out the best plan to survive.

Informing happens when the shooter's location and direction are communicated in real time. This means a message that is clear, direct, and in plain language not in codes. An example would be, "there is a man with a gun in the cafeteria, moving towards the library." Knowing actual information about a situation allows students and staff time to figure out how to respond. If they heard this information over an intercom and were on the other side of the school, they would know to escape. If they were right next to the library, they would know they should lock down. These kinds of messages can be conveyed through intercom announcements, but also through 911 calls to inform police. ALICE training would teach staff how to establish an emergency response plan which would outline clear methods to inform employees, students, and first responders.

A main takeaway from the training was that no single response fits all active shooter situations. Every person in a school or other place that could be affected by an active shooter needs to know their options for response. They need to have the knowledge and skills they need to try and survive.

As you all know, schools have a duty to protect our kids. Teachers and administrators have a responsibility to anticipate dangers and take precautions to protect everyone in their schools. Let's give those staff the tools they need to protect our kids. On the ALICE website: Alicetraining.com, you will find a wealth of press releases, research articles, videos, and other resources. Two especially important documents you'll find there are active shooter recommendations released by the US Department of Education in 2013, which argues that a lockdown only approach no longer meets their recommendations AND a VT memorandum that argues for options based responses to be implemented in VT schools.

In closing, I want to leave you with this brief story.

My step daughter and I were talking about ALICE the other day. She said she had told her friends that if a bad guy was in the school trying to hurt students, she was going to jump out the window and run away-just like I told her she could. Her

friend's response was, why would you risk your life and run away? You're supposed to stay in the corner like the teacher says! And that's what scares me. All those kids, hiding in a corner, under a table, just waiting for the threat to open the door. Let's empower these kids. Let's teach them and their teachers some skills to survive. Too much is at stake to just wait around to see what might be coming.

Thanks for your time.