

How to Barricade A Door



“How a door opens dictates how you’re going to barricade it,” says Steven Smith, who leads the Fort Lauderdale Police Department’s SWAT team and moonlights training teachers, businesses and city workers how to defend against hostile intruders. For a door that opens out, build a wall by stacking desks or propping a table up in order to block the intruder’s ability to see inside the room once the door is opened. For a door that swings in, push heavy furniture against it, prop a chair under the handle or use door jams.

Think of barricading as building what Smith calls “layers of resistance.” The first layer is a door lock. If you have one, bolt it; many active shooters, for example, aim for maximum casualties and will bypass a locked door. The

furniture blockade is your second layer. Build it quickly; you don’t want to be in front of the door as it is breached or shot through. If there’s no other exit option, position yourself along the wall next to the door. A hastily constructed barrier may not stop an attack, but it can stall an attacker, which gives you time to mount a counterambush. “Locate a weapon of opportunity,” Smith says. Your goal is to incapacitate the person with a blow to the head, using a blunt object like a fire extinguisher, a trophy or a paperweight. “Go for the person, not the weapon,” says Smith, whose SWAT team responded to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the Fort Lauderdale airport shootings.

Smith tells clients to take 30 seconds to assess every new room they enter, noting available exits and potential barricading materials. Learn to quickly identify a door’s orientation (whether it swings in or out). Prepare your office or classroom: Install a door handle with a push-button lock; keep a six-foot-long folding table handy if you have an outward-opening door; position heavy furniture like file cabinets near an inward-opening door; or install one of several door jams made specifically for barricading. While it’s unlikely you’ll ever deploy these tactics, Smith thinks it’s worthwhile to know them just as we drill for fires even though we’ll probably never be inside a burning building. “Unfortunately,” Smith says, “barricading a door is a life skill nowadays.” ♦