



# PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING HOSTILE SITUATIONS AT CHURCH

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As an organization  
dedicated to helping  
others, you welcome  
many people into  
your church.

*Unfortunately, this could mean you will face  
conflict or volatile situations.*





It's a complicated topic, especially given the very nature of churches:

- + Churches often have fixed schedules, making it easy to "case" situations in a manner that might go unnoticed.
- + Churches generally have multiple entry and exit points, which can help make it attractive to a person with violent intentions.
- + Churches generally frown on overt security, making church staff and members potentially appear more vulnerable.

To successfully defuse the situation and protect your church members and staff, it's essential to have an actionable plan in place before an incident occurs. The steps you and other church leaders take will minimize the risk in your facilities while safeguarding your people if a dangerous situation does erupt.

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## GETTING STARTED: ESTABLISH A SECURITY PLAN

Many churches establish a security team consisting of three to eight members who can review this document to help identify areas where your church may need to make adjustments to better protect your facility and your people.

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Another excellent resource may be your local police department. Once you've established your security plan, reach out to a local police official to arrange a walk-through at your church facility to see if they identify other areas to consider addressing.

Hostile situations can be categorized into three types: disruptive people, violent people or an active shooter. Each situation should be handled differently.

### *Handling Disruptive People*

Imagine it's just before Sunday service. A church member's estranged husband enters your church and begins verbally harassing and acting aggressive toward his wife and church staff. What steps do you take to diffuse the situation?

- + Ask the person to come to a less crowded area such as a church office (but do not go alone).
- + Attempt to find out the nature of the problem.
- + Try to resolve the problem.
- + If possible, de-escalate the situation using a non-confrontational, calm manner.
- + If the person will not come peacefully, or acts aggressively toward others or toward church property, call 911.



### ***Handling Violent People***

A church member experiencing mental health issues is behaving erratically during a bible study group and is asked to leave. The conversation doesn't go well, and as he is removed from the building, he threatens to harm the staff member escorting him out. The following Sunday, he's spotted driving dangerously fast into the parking lot and gets out of his car wearing a backpack and a long coat that is out of place for the climate. He quickly moves toward the main church building. What do you do?

- + Call 911.
- + If possible, remove people from the area and evacuate.
- + Lock doors to the building/other parts of the building such as children's and youth areas.
- + Find cover and wait for law enforcement to arrive.
- + Make your personal safety and safety of those around you the highest priority.

### ***Dealing With an Active Shooter***

This is, of course, every church leader's worst nightmare. Shots suddenly ring out during a crowded prayer service. How should you and the members of your security team react?

- + **GET OUT.** Immediately implement your security plan so you and your ushers can help as many people safely escape as possible.
- + **CALL OUT.** Call 911.
- + **HIDE OUT.** If no escape is available, take cover.
- + **TAKE OUT.** If there are no other options, you may have to take out the shooter.

In today's world, church security has become a top priority. But planning ahead — and periodically reviewing your church's security plan — can help you better protect yourself, church leaders, staff, volunteers and church members.

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