

3 STRATEGIES FOR DIFFUSING A TENSE SITUATION

One of the best ways to diffuse a tense situation is to have a plan in place that church leaders, frontline staff and volunteers can follow when they see potential problems develop.

Many churches establish a security team consisting of 3 to 8 members who can review this document to help identify areas where your church may need to make adjustments to better protect your people and facility. Another excellent resource is your local police department. Once you establish your security plan, reach out to a local police official to arrange a walk-through at your church to see if they identify other areas to consider addressing.

Supplement your security plan with these strategies for handling serious situations.

1. Handling Disruptive People

- Imagine it's just before Sunday service. The estranged husband of a parishioner enters your church and begins raising his voice toward church staff and his wife. What steps do you take to diffuse the situation?
 - If the person will not come peacefully, or acts aggressively toward others or toward church property, call 911.
 - De-escalate the situation if possible by using a non-confrontational, calm manner.
 - Try to resolve the problem.
 - Attempt to find out the nature of the problem.

- Ask the person to come to a less-crowded area such as the church office (but do not go alone).

2. Handling Violent People

- Picture that a member of your church's praise band who is dealing with mental health issues is removed from serving by the music minister due to erratic behavior. That conversation does not go well, and he threatens to harm the music minister. The following Sunday, he's spotted racing into the parking lot and gets out of his car wearing a backpack and long overcoat. He quickly moves toward the main church building. What do you do?
 - Make your personal safety and safety of those around you the highest priority.
 - Find cover and wait for law enforcement to arrive.
 - Lock doors to the building/other parts of the building, such as children's and youth areas.
 - If possible, remove people from the area and evacuate.
 - Call 911.

3. 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?
 - **Fight.** If there are no other options and as a last resort when lives are in imminent danger, you may have to take out the active shooter with whatever is available to you.
 - **Hide.** If no escape is available, take cover.
 - **Call 911.** Do this as soon as it is safe to do so.
 - **Escape.** Immediately implement your security plan so you and your ushers can help as many people as possible safely escape.

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 parishioners.

For More Information

GuideOne Insurance (<https://www.guideone.com/>)

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Homeland Security: Shooter Preparedness (<https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>)

FEMA Resources to Protect Your House of Worship (<https://www.fema.gov/faith-resources>)

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