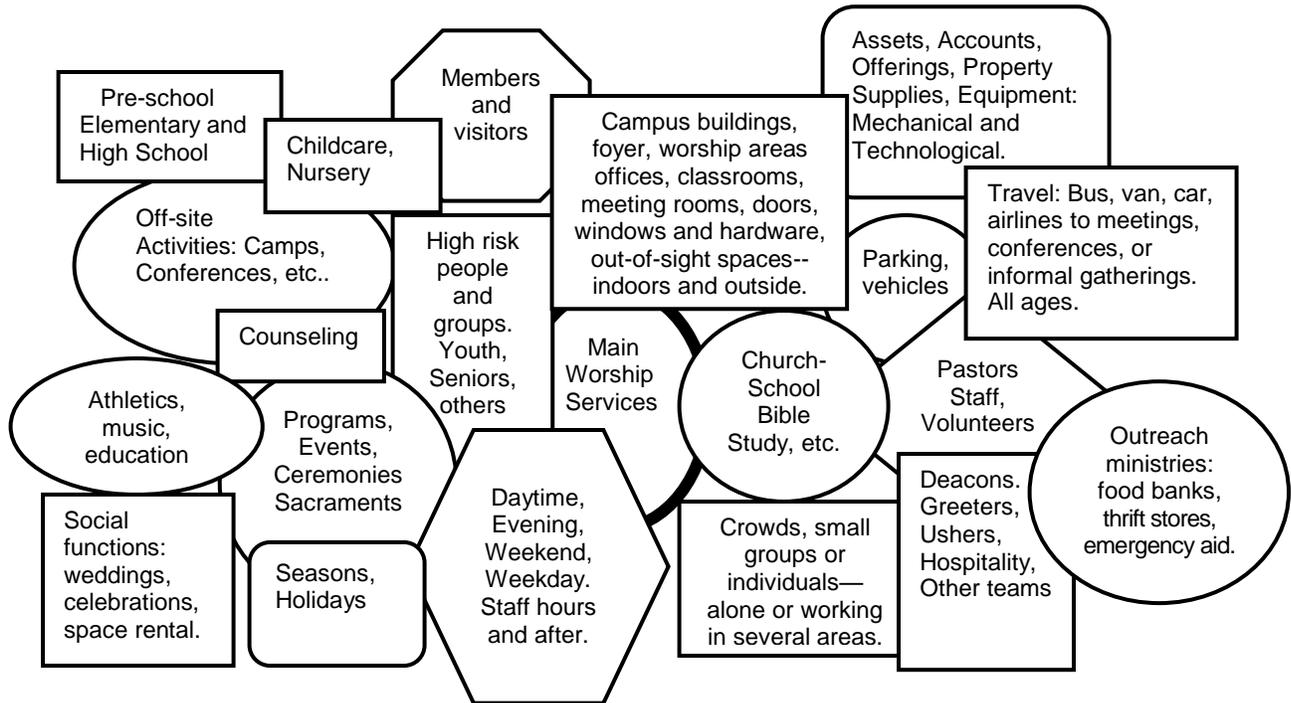


# Place of Worship Safety and Security: Five Components of a Comprehensive Program

**To be optimally effective, a safety and security program needs to be focused on every aspect of your place of worship.**

## **People, Places, Property, Programs and Processes**



1. Crimes against people and property. Many potentials.
2. Violent actions (Shootings, bombs, assaults, etc.) by individuals or groups.
3. Violence targeting one person, a group or the congregation.
4. Natural disasters and weather emergencies.
5. Mechanical, electrical and utility failures and related emergencies and damage.
6. Accidents and injuries from minor to fatal.
7. Problems involving children or youth.
8. Illnesses and medical emergencies.
9. Fires and water and smoke damage.
10. Loss due to robbery, theft or fraud.
11. Misuse of supplies, equipment or money.
12. Vandalism.
13. Threats (Phone, mail or in person).
14. Disruptions—intentional or unintentional.
15. Vehicle damage or theft.
16. Stalking of pastors, staff or members.
17. Domestic quarrels or other conflicts, erupting at church.
18. Lawsuits and harm to church reputation.
19. Incidents and problems on or off-site that adversely effect the church or members.
20. Anything else that harms the effectiveness of the church, continuity of church operations or the safety and security of staff, members and visitors.

- What are some unique risk factors for your place of worship? Consider the building or campus, pastors, staff, activities, special groups or people, notoriety, size, etc.
- Looking at the graphic on the previous page and the list below that, how prepared do you think the leaders, adults in charge or others are, for an emergency, at your church? Would you say the safety and security program is as "big picture" as optimal? What might be missing?
- Is your church providing guidance to those who may need to know how to respond and assist others in an emergency? Have you tested to see if they know?

## **Components of a Comprehensive Program:**

### **1. Safety and Security Committee: Umbrella Function**

Role and activities vary: Size of the place of worship, its needs and leadership preferences. (Church Life, Shepherd's Committee, Safety Net, Guardian Program, Sword and Shield, etc.)

- Ensures a whole-church approach; leads the way; provides oversight of safety and security related activities, plans and purchases. Makes recommendations to church leadership.
- Schedules ongoing status assessments (may or may not participate in them), reviews reports, makes recommendations or implements responses.
- Develops activities or finds volunteers, to expand the effectiveness of the program. (See material about the Emergency Medical team, for example.)
- A wide range of church members can participate. (Ages, capabilities, expertise, etc.)
- Also consider those who have craftsman, mechanical or technical expertise, who could be advisory members for semi-annual or annual activities. (Don't assume they will want to volunteer their services.)
- Consider those who are interested, will advance the program and improve it over time and are positive communicators about the concepts. .
- Committee members will be most helpful if they are concerned about the *big picture*.
- Practical aspects: Do not establish a set number of members on the committee. Request members rather than asking for volunteers. This is a very important committee which requires maturity, excellent judgment and the ability to work well with church leadership and others.
- Many insurance companies have suggestions for safety and security programs and the committee can liaison with the church's insurance provider.

- Who would be a good addition to the safety and security committee in your place of worship? Who could be an occasional resource?
- Would it be possible to include a wider range of ages and capabilities? (Consider this, as a way to make the program truly whole-church.)

## 1A. Safety and Security Committee -- *Security Response Team*

In many places of worship this is the only focused safety and security group. It is sometimes called the Emergency Response Team, Safety Response Team or some other term to clarify its role.

**Coordination:** It is beneficial for the team to work with the committee or under the overall leadership of the pastoral staff, rather than being completely independent as to functions, attire, weapons and equipment and response thresholds. This helps for liability concerns as well as coordination of efforts.

**Membership:** Often comprised of church members in law enforcement, fire department, paramedics, former military, etc. However, this does not have to be a tactical-response team. It may consist of any capable adults who can assist others in emergencies.

•In large places of worship, or where there are special concerns, off-duty law enforcement officers are sometimes hired during main services or events, to ensure an immediate protective or tactical response while waiting for 911 responders.

**Other issues:** There are wide variations in attire, identifying pins, equipment, weapons, etc. There are websites that give detailed information about security teams, or other churches may have experiences to share.

### **Common Functions of a Security Response Team:**

\*Usually given specific assignments: Provide protection for the pastor or others, patrol parking lots, check halls, maintain a position in the sanctuary, etc.

\*Respond to various emergencies (safety, security, weather, mechanical and medical) and call for 911 assistance when needed.

\*Assist during and after evacuations.

\*Observe at entrances, in the sanctuary, throughout the building, parking lots, etc.

\*Handle disruptions through containment or diversion and get 911 assistance if needed.

\*Respond to violent incidents in the way appropriate for training levels and capabilities.

\*Evaluate situations to determine the level of threat and to call for 911 assistance if needed.

\*Use safety equipment, flashlights, EADs, first aid kits, etc.

**Expand the work of the Security Response Team:** Encourage the team to expand their efforts to include researching and providing training to individuals and groups about:

\*Travel safety, event safety and security, liability concerns and issues related to high-risk programs.

\*Recent events, nationwide and locally—how to prevent them and how to respond. (Violent incidents, criminal actions, accidents, actions by leaders, staff, teachers and others, serious emergencies, etc.)

**Training Suggestions for a Security Response Team:** Training may be provided by professional resources such as police or private groups, or by researching and reviewing best response methods, applied to the specific facility. (Church insurance companies and related publications are good resources for many activities and can also provide information to help prevent criminal and civil liability concerns.)

Training topics:

- \*Requirements, policies, liability concerns, scheduling, attire, conduct.
- \*Situational roles, hand signals, observation and reporting techniques and methods, etc.
- \*Evacuation procedures for each area. \*Quick lock-down or lock-out procedures.
- \*Identify barricades, barriers, shields and concealment, throughout the facility. Identify shelter-in-place locations and consider how those might be used.
- \*Develop plans for a variety of response needs. (Have team members research events in other churches to develop realistic scenarios: Minor and major disruptions, other types of emergencies, violent situations, explosives, threats, etc.)

**Special training for handling disruptions:** Be aware of pastoral preferences about what is considered excessive disruption. This may vary by place of worship and the situations there.

- \*Calming and controlling techniques. (These can be very useful. Research these from various sources, especially if you have specific concerns in mind.)
- \*Methods for a *Shield and Guard* approach to protecting the congregation, pastoral team or specific individuals and methods for a *Divert and Direct* approach to controlling a disruptive person or moving him or her out of an area and into a more controlled area until police arrive.

•What kind of *non-violent* or *violent* disruptions have occurred in your place of worship--or are potential concerns based on issues such as location, church functions and activities or other reasons?

Remember: The phrase, *there were lessons learned*, is often a way of saying errors or ineffectiveness happened. Do not wait to learn lessons at the expense of people and your place of worship.

### **Special training for handling violent incidents:**

For this training, use knowledgeable instructors or do careful research about the best practices for situations. Save a record of training by date, training received and those present. Save all printed material and document with photos to show attendees and activities.

**A guideline:** *It's always better to walk-through than to talk-through.* Practice a variety of scenarios by doing slow walk-through explanations of response plans, then real-time.

•All planned responses should be in combination with calling 911 for police, fire or medical assistance, as needed.

## **1B. Safety and Security Committee -- *Emergency Medical Response Team*** **(Often called "Health and Safety Team", "Church Life Team", Church Nurse Team, etc.)**

•May be comprised of medical professionals, but can be effective with others--preferably with training in First Aid and CPR. The team's primary role is to provide assistance in minor situations, to be ready to respond to medical and other emergencies and to stand by for 911 responders.

•**Activities:** Minor first aid; assessment of situations, emergency CPR or use of EAD; educational roles; present for high-risk activities or with high-risk groups.

•**Expanded activities:** This team can very successfully incorporate activities and education about various church-wide health and wellness activities: brief classroom visits to talk about safety, hand-out material on home safety, blood-drives, health-fairs, awards, etc.

•Training may consist of First Aid, use of on-site equipment and information to help team members be effective at other designated activities.

•Who would be a good addition to an Emergency Medical Response Team?

•What functions could the team provide to increase whole-church safety and security?

## **1C. Security Liaisons: Someone for each event or activity, when the security team is not present.**

This is a crucial role that ensures someone in a meeting or at an event is focused on being ready for an emergency of any kind, if the Safety and Security Team is not present.

A Security Liaison (or whatever your church chooses to call this role) may be the person who gets the keys for a room being used for a Bible Study, the hostess for a shower, the Youth Director who is coordinating a Saturday night pizza party, one or more selected adults from the volunteers helping with summer camp, etc.

### **Among the tasks of a Security Liaison:**

\*Have a cell phone readily available. Be alert to problems of all kinds, so a call for assistance can be made quickly.

\*Communicate with people in his or her meeting to prevent or stop hazardous or dangerous situations or use the cell phone to call a Security Team member for assistance.

### **Provide Safety Liaisons with prepared brief instructions or procedures, according to the event in which they are involved:**

\*Opening and closing the building or room; using the kitchen or supplies; turning on heat or air conditioning; contact numbers for electrical, plumbing or HVAC emergencies; making sure outside doors are locked while the meeting is going on; reminders about procedures for keeping children safe, etc.

\*Those who regularly are Safety Liaisons will benefit from any special training provided by a security team or simply from discussions with church leaders about safety and security.

## 2. Safety and Security Inspections/Assessments

Sometimes called: Site Surveys, Risk Assessments, Audits.  
(A thorough assessment combines them all.)

**The ideal:** An ongoing program of completely and thoroughly inspecting every aspect of the people, places, property, processes and programs of the church and its activities identifying risks and deciding what actions should be taken to reduce the potential for harm.

### A Basic Assessing Approach

- **Use past and future church calendars to ensure including all activities:** List all of the activities in and away from the church. Recurring activities should be discussed several months out, to consider problems and needs in the past.
- **One List:** List the key people, places, property, programs and processes involved in each activity. Assess each of those with a focus on the reasonable potential for problems.
- **Second list:** Develop an inventory list of items and features that could be at risk for loss or damage, or that could inadvertently cause harm. (Decorations and art, architectural features, special furniture, antiques, appliances, equipment and mechanical items) Use this list and add to it in subsequent assessments—it's valuable for insurance purposes too.
- **Assess many times:** Make this an ongoing, year-round activity. Observe during many activities and events, at varying times of the day, week and year, in every season, in every lighting condition, during special programs, off-site and during travel, and with varying numbers of people present. Assess the activities of key staff who may be at risk. Assess programs and processes, including professional audits of financial matters.
- **Identify concerns:** Using logic, reasonableness and best practices, identify situations where something could go wrong or where something or someone could be at risk.
- **What if?** Consider some of the most obvious “what if” situations and ask for input from others to develop a full list of potential harmful scenarios.
- **Develop reasonable responses, procedures and plans for:**
  - \*What could prevent a potential incident or harm?
  - \*What would reduce harm or provide a defense or shelter?
  - \*What will everyone involved do when (not *if*, but *when*) this happens?
- **Report:** After every assessment, even brief or situational ones, write a short *status, actions and recommendations* report for the Safety and Security Committee.
- **Follow-up** to ensure that problems have been corrected or that risks have been reduced.

### **3. Procedures and Plans (and training about them):**

**Think: What could go wrong?** (Consider the Big Picture of emergencies.)

Next, through text and lists, answer the questions:

- How might we prevent it? •Detect it early? •Protect against it? •Reduce harm?
- Respond to it quickly? •What will we do when it happens?

**Format:** The easiest way to write Policies, Plans and Procedures is to start with an Overview, Scenario or Goal, then give a list of explanations or actions.

Further details can be provided in training material.

Every procedure and plan should be reviewed often to see if it is still useful and correct.

### **4. A Safety and Security Manual:**

•The purpose of having a manual is to consolidate and document all the policies, procedures and plans involved in the safety and security program. It is the complete package and should be treated as a highly secured document or computer file, even in a very small program.

•**Computer files:** It is convenient to have documents in computer file folders by topic, within a Church Safety and Security file folder.

Individuals can be responsible for developing procedures or plans about their area of responsibility, then those e-files can be sent to the coordinator for inclusion in the manual. (Editing for clarity or correctness is a touchy subject, but may need to be done.)

**Hard copies of the manual:** The hard copy can be in a binder using tabs or colored paper to separate sections and make items easier to find. Keep a list of who has the complete manual. It will always be in a state of development, so it never has to be perfect or finished, just accurate.

**Smaller handbooks:** In addition to the large manual, safety and security handbooks or guides about specific areas or programs are useful for distributing to staff, teachers, volunteers and others.

\*Having smaller handbooks ensures that people are more likely to read the material and have it in their classrooms, offices or bring it with them when they are responsible for a church activity.

**Other items:** Consider laminating a sheet of the most important contact information or instructions for responses to fires, accidents or illnesses, areas of shelter, etc. and placing these in every classroom and office in the place of worship.

### **5. Ongoing education, information and involvement:**

Make safety and security efforts an active part of the life and work of leaders, teachers and volunteers. Ensure that members have the information they need to protect themselves and others in many situations.

**How to provide training:** Written material, meetings with presentations, fun quizzes, walk-throughs of various emergency responses, email information, web-site items, material sent home with children, one-on-one conversations, pamphlets, etc.

•Training may be provided or developed by the Security Team, the Emergency Medical Team, committee members or others.

For example, in one church, the maintenance staff trained those who were often in the church after hours, on how to turn off the water supply if needed and other important mechanical information.

•In many churches an individual or group is responsible for developing short training, producing checklists of special areas and other written or electronically distributed material.

### **A Dozen Tips for Whole-Church Safety and Security:**

**1. Develop a phone and text network.**

**2. Limit unlocked doors.**

**3. Keep all valuables secure, all the time.**

**4. Have procedures for money and asset handling.**

**5. Protect children and youth.**

\*Background checks on staff and volunteers;

\*Sign-in and out, for drop-off and pick-up.

\*Do not let children be unattended in any area of the church.

\*Have more than one adult present with any child at any time.

\*Consider the ages and maturity of youth leaders and ensure that they are capable of providing guidance and control when needed.

**6. Counseling programs should have procedures and protocols to protect both the counselor and those being counseled.**

**7. Regularly check appliances, machines and equipment.**

**8. Emergency response plans, especially evacuation plans, should be well known.**

**9. Make transportation safety a priority.**

**10. Have safety briefings before off-site events.**

**11. Encourage greeters, ushers, deacons and others to be alert and ready to call for assistance.**

**12. Have a special focus on the pastor during services—and conduct separate training for the pastor and worship leaders.**

•What other ideas have you found useful?

### **Essential Responses to Disruptions:**

Church leadership may provide guidelines about the degree of disruption that is allowable before action is taken. The totality of the situation will usually be the determining factor.

•In some cases it is better to leave the disruptive or threatening person alone, back away and stay away or in a safe place until assistance arrives. (See the download material.)

### **Essential responses to violent situations: (See the download material)**

1. Get down and stay down and concealed. Or,
2. Get out and get away from the building. Or,
3. Get to a concealed place in the building, behind a barrier or temporary barricade. (That is why it is useful to know where such barriers are in every area of a building.
4. Get help. Call 911. Or, if you are not concealed and it would not increase your danger, yell or scream to alert others, tell them to get down, get out or get help.
5. Guide others to safety or keep them in place and assist them as needed.
6. If getting down or getting out is not an option, take any action possible to stop the assailant—improvising a weapon and using it forcefully, throwing objects or furniture, tackling or hitting.

### **Essential responses to fire emergencies**

1. Call 911 and state the type of fire and where it is located in the building.
2. Only then should you use fire extinguishers, if appropriate and possible. Your first response should be to call for emergency assistance.
3. If you are responsible for others, direct them to an exit or go with them.
4. **In any situation: *When in doubt, get out.***

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### **Your Personal Plans of Action**

Your personal situation will undoubtedly have an effect on what you will do in an emergency. Develop personal plans of action and share them with your family, if they attend with you, or with those who are usually seating near you.

1. **Where are you before, during and after services?** What might occur during any service and what would be your plans of action? How could you assist others?
2. **Do members of your family who may not be sitting with you (especially children and youth), know what to do in an emergency if you are not near them?**
3. **When you go to special programs, social functions or other church events, do you think ahead about safety and security issues?**

**4. Do you know who to contact about various emergency situations in the church?** In addition to 911 needs, what about a broken water pipe, broken window, minor scrape or cut, restroom problem, kitchen concerns and other issues?

**5. Expand your knowledge.** Read about the many issues related to the big picture of safety and security, to increase your ability to effectively *observe, assess and take action* in many situations. Help others to do the same.

The material in this handout provides an overview of ideas and suggestions, but there is much more to safety and security than can be provided in one short seminar. Use the following resources (as well as others you find):

### **Resources:**

**1. Additional material to download, without charge, at [www.tinalewisrowe.com](http://www.tinalewisrowe.com).**

**2. *The Church Safety and Security Guidebook: Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.*** This is a very effective text on the subject. [www.brotherhoodmutual.com](http://www.brotherhoodmutual.com).

**3. [www.guideone.com/safety-resources/education/](http://www.guideone.com/safety-resources/education/)** GuideOne Insurance has dozens of very useful, brief guides on their website, under the Education tab.

**4. *Church Safety and Security: A Practical Guide.*** Robert M. Cirtin. [www.csspub.com](http://www.csspub.com) .

**5. Your own church insurance company.** Your insurance company wants you to reduce risk to zero! They can be an excellent resource for many safety and security issues.

**6. Websites and organizations that have church security information and resources** [www.carlchinn.com](http://www.carlchinn.com), [www.churchsecurityconsultant.com](http://www.churchsecurityconsultant.com), [www.safechurch.com](http://www.safechurch.com), [www.pstcco.com](http://www.pstcco.com), etc.

**7. [www.churchlawandtax.com](http://www.churchlawandtax.com).** This is a great website with a wide range of low-priced documents.

**8. Local police, fire, sheriffs, medical response teams, civil defense, utility companies, Red Cross, electrical companies, HVAC companies, locksmiths, etc.,** according to your information needs. (Use the most direct resource possible to get the most current information and advice, rather than attempting to find all of your information from one source.)