



DEFEND TODAY,
SECURE TOMORROW

THE POWER OF HELLO GUIDE FOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP

PROMOTING STAFF VIGILANCE THROUGH THE POWER OF HELLO

Freedom of religion and the right to peaceably assemble are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and recognized as fundamental parts of American society. Maintaining their integrity is vital to sustaining the American way of life.

As demonstrated by tragic events across the country, terrorists and other violent extremist actors continue to attempt to disrupt the American democracy, instill fear, and/or cause harm. These adversaries sometimes identify houses of worship as targets of opportunity given their relative ease of access. Keeping these facilities secure while sustaining the open and welcoming environment necessary for peaceful congregation requires a holistic approach to security.

All houses of worship support personnel can contribute greatly to enhancing security by understanding how to identify behavioral indicators and taking precautionary actions to safely mitigate the impacts of a potential attack.

Used effectively, the right words can be a **powerful tool**.

Simply saying “Hello” can prompt a casual conversation with a new person, providing an opportunity to observe and establish a connection. The OHNO approach—Observe, Initiate a Hello, Navigate the Risk, and Obtain Help—enables staff to observe and evaluate suspicious behaviors, empowering them to lower risk and obtain help when necessary.



The OHNO approach describes activities and behaviors that may be suspicious or indicative of criminal activity. These activities may be constitutionally protected and should be reported only when there are articulable facts to support a rational conclusion that the behavior is suspicious. Do not report based solely on protected activities, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or a combination of only such factors.



OBSERVE

To improve overall security and detect potential threats, staff should be aware of their surroundings, and consciously observe and assess others. While the considerations below are not necessarily indications of malicious intent, within appropriate contexts, they can help identify suspicious behavior.

Behavior

Is the person appearing to study security measures in the house of worship? Do they seem to be trying to avoid a camera?

Has the person left their car idling without apparent reason?

Is the person seeming to linger a long time in their vehicle?

Is this person trying to go unnoticed?

Is this person asking about other members or leadership?

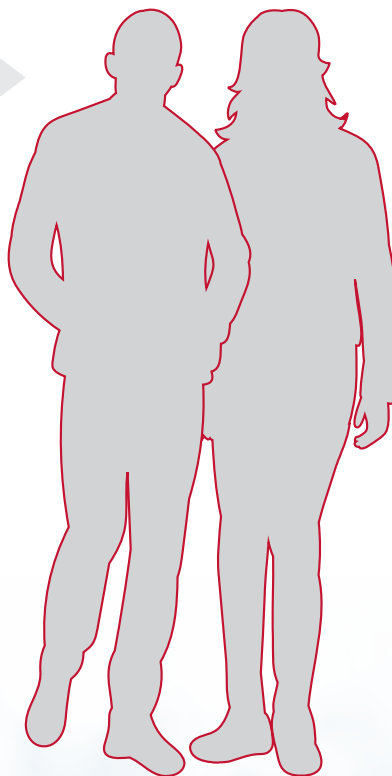
Is this person demanding to speak with clergy or house of worship leadership?

Is this person repeatedly walking in and out of the service or sanctuary?

Is this person attempting to get an usher or someone else to leave the sanctuary with them?

Is this person behaving as a 'lookout,' nervously glancing out of doors and windows?

Is this person standing alone or facing the congregation when others are seated?



Context

Is this person loitering (and not entering the house of worship) without reasonable explanation?

Is this person alone or part of a group?

Is this person familiar with the house of worship? Do they seem to know where they are going?

Is this person familiar to me or anyone in the community?

Is this an appropriate time for a new guest to be at the house of worship? (Is the congregation meeting for a private vs. public event?)

Is this event advertised?

Is the person asking questions about house of worship functions, event schedules, or attendance?

Does the person who has entered seem unfamiliar to all other congregants?

Is the person behaving in some way that is very inconsistent with the norms of the site?

Attire

Is this person wearing unusually inappropriate clothing for the house of worship environment?

Is this person wearing military style gear such as tactical gear?

Is this person appearing to conceal something under their clothing?

Is this person carrying anything that may seem unusual for the surroundings?

SECURITY TIPS

Encourage each staff member to be observant about people and situations in the parking lot, in areas adjacent to the house of worship, and in rooms and hallways inside, both before, during, and after services and activities. For instance: Are there unaccompanied bags? Are other doors locked that should be open? Are doors propped open that should be closed?

Unless there is a legitimate reason for people to remain in halls, rooms and offices, or to stand outside, courteously remind them that the service has started. If there is a reason for concern, courteously remind the person that the service has begun. If there is still a clear security concern, stay present until the individual either enters the service or leaves.

Approaching a person viewed as suspicious has potential risks. In some situations it may be more advisable to report the activity to those with the authority and training to intervene.



INITIATE A HELLO

As staff welcome visitors, a kind greeting with eye contact can make the difference in how a visitor reacts, even if they are angry or upset. This interaction is the essence of the Power of Hello.

Practice the Power of Hello by doing or saying the following:

Tip: These are important questions, and active listening is key.

Hello, how are you?

Welcome. Is this your first time here?

How can I assist you today?

Are you looking for someone in particular?

Is there any way we can make today more meaningful for you?

SECURITY TIPS

If an unknown visitor arrives, be polite, engage in conversation, and steer them to a clearly visible seat.

Without documentation, it is very difficult to prove an incident occurred. Ensure that staff document every encounter they have with suspicious person(s). This information could be used in law enforcement actions or judicial proceedings.



NAVIGATE THE RISK

Observe, consider the context, and mentally assess the situation.

Navigate the risk by asking yourself the following questions:

Is everything normal?

Do they seem to need assistance?

Is there something worrying about this situation?

Is there a potential for danger?

The Power of Hello relies, in part, on an individual's ability to detect behavior that would arouse reasonable suspicion of terrorism or other criminal activity. The following indicators warrant prompt reporting.

SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY INDICATORS

- Expressed or implied threats to commit acts of violence or destruction
- Abusive language that a reasonable person might find threatening
- Statements or behaviors indicative of suicidal or homicidal ideations
- Inappropriate statements about harming others
- Exaggerated or violent gestures (e.g., clenching fists or jaws) that could be interpreted by a reasonable person as threatening or intimidating

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ARMED INTRUDER

- Movement like touching a presumptive firearm secured at hips or waist
- Unusual body movements (positioning oneself or moving in a manner to shield a weapon from view)
- Bulges in clothing indicative of a weapon

If staff encounters any individual displaying these tendencies or someone who appears to be armed, they should obtain help, contact law enforcement and notify house of worship leadership immediately.

SECURITY TIPS

Encourage all visitors to sign a guest book to include their name and contact information.



OBTAIN HELP

Be aware, alert, and ready to summon help. Leverage relationships with local law enforcement for non-emergency notifications. If staff feel threatened, they should calmly walk away and lock the doors, note a physical description of the individual; and call 9-1-1.

When reporting to authorities, consider the five “W’s”:



WHO is doing something suspicious?
What do they look like? What are they wearing?



WHAT are they doing that arouses suspicion?



WHEN did they act suspiciously?



WHERE did the suspicious activity take place? Where is the person now?



WHY is the person acting suspiciously? Could they be under the influence of alcohol or drugs?

SECURITY TIPS

Invite local police to tour the facility so that they are familiar with the layout of the facility and associated buildings. Provide law enforcement with floor plans and access to locked and secured areas.

Know how to lock the doors quickly and be ready to do so the moment trouble develops. The goal is to prevent outside danger from coming inside to harm the congregation.

Consider locking unused offices and rooms. If staff can walk into a room or office, someone who wants to commit a crime can do so as well.



Incident Response Best Practices

Houses of worship should develop plans and procedures for responding to emergencies. Part of incident planning means developing an easy way for all to report suspicious activity. This includes non-threatening suspicious activity or persons.

Notification Chain Considerations



What should the first greeter who becomes aware of a problem do?



Who will help the greeter, and who will inform/warn the clergy, leadership, congregation?



Who will summon law enforcement?



Who will lock the doors to keep an assailant out, if that is even possible?



Who will guide congregants to safety? How will they do it?

INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Crisis situations are uncomfortable to talk about—a communication plan can reduce the chaos of an emergency.

- Create a planning team whose key function is to plan for potential crises.
- Develop the plan in partnership with other community groups, including law enforcement, fire department, and emergency medical services.
- Create visuals to display prominently in the building so that members routinely see points of egress and exit, lock-down procedures, and shelter-in-place locations.
- Rehearse emergency plans on a regular basis so that everyone knows what to do in the event of the real thing.
- Shelter-in-place requires everyone immediately find a room with no or few windows and take refuge. All windows, exterior doors, and other openings should be closed and locked.

Consult local law enforcement or the local Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Protective Security Advisor if help is required to develop an emergency action plan.¹

Active Shooter Response Best Practices

Houses of worship staff should be well informed of emergency action plans in place to assist congregants during an active shooter incident.

RUN



Encourage congregants to evacuate and leave belongings behind. Call 9-1-1 when it's safe to do so. Follow police instructions.

HIDE



If congregants are unable to get away safely, encourage them to hide, get out of the assailant's view, and stay quiet. Silence all electronic devices. Lock and block doors, close blinds, and turn off the lights. Encourage congregants to spread out or hide separately, and stay in place.

FIGHT



As last resort, congregants will need to be prepared to defend themselves. Commit aggressive actions for ambushing the assailant together with others, using makeshift weapons such as chairs, fire extinguishers, scissors, and books which may distract and disarm the assailant.

¹ [cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors](https://www.cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors) or email central@cisa.dhs.gov

Resources

Faith Based Organizations - Houses of Worship (FBO-HoW)

cisa.gov/faith-based-organizations-houses-worship

Provides resources that inform FBO-HOW security-based decisions. Includes an FBO-HOW Security Self-Assessment.

Employee Vigilance – Power of Hello

cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello

Provides resources regarding the Power of Hello approach to help employees and patrons observe and evaluate suspicious behavior and report when necessary.

CISA Active Shooter Preparedness Resources

cisa.gov/active-shooter-preparedness

Provides a variety of resources, including information on classroom training, workshops throughout the U.S., and online training available through FEMA.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Active Shooter Preparedness Resources

fbi.gov/survive

Provides operational, behaviorally-based threat assessment and threat management services to help detect and prevent acts of targeted violence, helping academic, mental health, business, community, law enforcement, and government entities recognize and disrupt potential active shooters who may be on a trajectory toward violence.

Emergency Action Planning Guide

cisa.gov/publication/active-shooter-emergency-action-plan-guide

Provides a comprehensive video on active shooter preparedness, response, and recovery.

Federal Emergency Management Agency's Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship

hsdl.org/?abstract&did=739220

Provides guidance on developing high-quality emergency operations plans for Houses of Worship.

Department of Homeland Security's If You See Something, Say Something®

dhs.gov/see-something-say-something

Provides additional information on how to recognize and report the indicators of terrorism-related suspicious activity.

