



ACTIVE BYSTANDER INTERVENTION AND DE-ESCALATION

Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention

In an increasingly complex world, our collective safety often depends on ordinary individuals who are willing to take action in challenging situations.

According to the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) 2020 report on Mass Attacks in Public Spaces, two-thirds of attackers exhibited behaviors that elicited concern in other people. More than half of the attackers' behaviors concerned others to the point that the observer feared for their own safety or that of others.

Active bystander intervention and de-escalation techniques represent potent approaches that can prevent harm, diffuse tension, and create safer spaces. So, how can organizations foster a culture where active intervention becomes the norm?

Active bystander intervention occurs when someone recognizes a potentially harmful situation and takes steps to influence the outcome positively. Whether addressing harassment, preventing violence, or interrupting discriminatory behavior, bystanders have tremendous power to change the trajectory of concerning situations.

The goals of bystander intervention are to:

- Rehumanize the parties involved.
- Defuse the situation by shifting the energy.
- Create space for potential conflict transformation (justice/sustainable peace)

According to the Department of Homeland Security, "De-escalation' involves using communication or other techniques during an encounter to stabilize, slow, or reduce the intensity of a potentially violent situation without using physical force or by reducing the use of force."¹ De-escalation techniques focus on reducing emotional intensity and preventing conflicts from intensifying. These skills are valuable in various contexts, from workplace disagreements to potential violence.

Effective bystander intervention doesn't always mean direct confrontation; sometimes, a situation is better served by *not* intervening.

The goals of interpersonal de-escalation are to:

- Re-humanize the parties involved.
- Defuse the situation by shifting the energy.
- Create space for potential conflict transformation (justice/sustainable peace)

Remaining vigilant and taking proactive measures to secure critical infrastructure and public gathering locations requires implementing various security measures to mitigate potential threats.

¹Department of Homeland Security Policy Statement 044-05, [dhs.gov/publication/law-enforcement](https://www.dhs.gov/publication/law-enforcement) | Homeland Security

CISA (the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) offers a suite of resources to assist organizations by empowering security and non-security staff with critical skills around de-escalation. CISA identifies four categories of activities for effective de-escalation:

Recognize

Early detection of potentially violent behavior hinges on understanding and identifying the subtle behavioral signals that may indicate an individual is moving toward potentially harmful actions. People who may be contemplating targeted violence typically exhibit a pattern of escalating, troubling behaviors that are most likely to be noticed by family, friends, and close associates. Those closest to a person are often best positioned to recognize the gradual progression of concerning behaviors that could precede targeted violence.

Assess

When you notice something concerning, your first step is carefully evaluating the situation. It's important not to jump to conclusions but to understand the level of risk and the most appropriate response.

Ask yourself three key questions:

1. What exactly did I observe that seems off or troubling?
2. Is there an immediate danger that requires urgent action?
3. How might the person react if someone approaches them about their behavior?

Based on your answers, the goal is to choose the right approach, whether that's taking immediate emergency steps, finding a way to calm the situation down, or seeking a professional assessment. The key is to stay calm, be observant, and prioritize safety - both for the person of concern and those around them, including yourself.

De-escalate

De-escalating a situation involves taking purposeful actions to calm a volatile situation, which should be attempted by trained and proficient personnel if it is safe. Make sure that you know your limits - seek assistance if needed. And remember, your safety and the safety of others is the highest priority!

Report

Think of reporting as being a responsible teammate. You're not trying to get anyone in trouble - you're helping to support someone who might be struggling and protect everyone around them. Your observations could be the crucial piece that prevents a serious incident from happening.



See Something, Say Something - But Do It Right.....

- Be a fact reporter, not a drama creator. Stick to what you actually saw or heard.
- Provide clear, specific details about behaviors that concerned you.
- If you know who's involved, share that information.
- Note any unusual actions, like attempts to dodge security or extreme emotional reactions.
- If you're aware of any underlying issues or grievances, include those details.
- If you see something, say something®:
<https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>

Urgent vs. Not Urgent: Know the Difference

- Immediate threat? Call 9-1-1 right away.
- No immediate danger? Follow your organization's official reporting process.

More reporting resources:

- FBI Terrorism Online Tips: <https://tips.fbi.gov/>
- Nationwide SAR Initiative: <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>

Your report could be the early warning that helps professionals intervene before a situation escalates. You're not just reporting - you're potentially helping someone get the support they need and keeping everyone safer.

Again, the goal isn't to punish, but to prevent. Your careful, compassionate observation could make all the difference.

With any intervention, it's important to remember a few key things:

- Use "I" statements to express concern
- Avoid aggressive or confrontational language
- Create a physical or conversational barrier or diversion to interrupt the potentially harmful interaction
- Don't put yourself at unnecessary risk
- Trust your instincts
- Be aware of power dynamics
- Enlist help from other bystanders
- Contact emergency services if there's immediate danger

ONGOING SUPPORT:

[De-Escalation Action Guide](#): This Action Guide provides an overview of the primary steps that may be taken to de-escalate a potentially violent situation and consolidates the CISA De-escalation Series1 into this single, easy-to-use resource.

[De-Escalation Series](#): How to recognize someone on a path to violence, assess an escalating situation, practice de-escalation techniques, and report information



[De-Escalation and Community Safety Directory: Trainings Available in Your State:](#)

Connect with local organizations that provide de-escalation, bystander intervention, community safety, and conflict resolution training, as well as those offering virtual or nationwide programs.

[Violence Prevention through De-escalation Video](#) - The video provides both security and non-security professionals with principles and techniques to augment traditional security protocols.

[102s - First Responders Toolbox - Bystanders Are Key To Countering Terrorism-survey.pdf](#) - Highlights the important role bystanders can play in public safety through recognition, intercession, and reporting pertinent concerning behaviors to authorities.

[The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting \(SAR\) Initiative \(NSI\)](#) - A joint collaborative effort by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners. This initiative provides law enforcement with another tool to help prevent terrorism and other related criminal activity by establishing a national capacity for gathering, documenting, processing, analyzing, and sharing SAR information.

TRAINING

o FBI Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is a national-level, multiagency, multidisciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence through the application of behavior-based operational support, training, and research. Encouraging bystander reporting is one of their top missions. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made through the Behavioral Analysis Unit Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office.

<https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>

o FBI Local Field Office Behavioral Threat Management Coordinators - All 56 FBI field offices have coordinators who handle support and training requests from agencies in their local area across programs, threat issues, and investigative efforts. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>





Expert Security Guidance: CenterLink offers members FREE 45-minute safety and security consultations with our contracted security firm, TAL Global. Consultations are a great way for centers to talk about specific issues and questions related to safety and security concerns. We will offer security solutions, best practices, and guidance on connecting with law enforcement or the FBI, helping to cultivate a culture of safety in your community. Contact Tanya@lgbtcenters.org to schedule your free consultation.

Incident Reporting: Has your center had a safety or security incident? Threats of violence or harassment? Let us know by filling out a brief report, [CenterLink Safety and Security Incident Report](#), and we will follow up with opportunities for support.

Safety and Security Resources: For more resources designed to help community center leaders and staff navigate the rapidly evolving safety and security landscape, login to your My CenterLink account and visit www.lgbtcenters.org/Safety-And-Security.