



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.

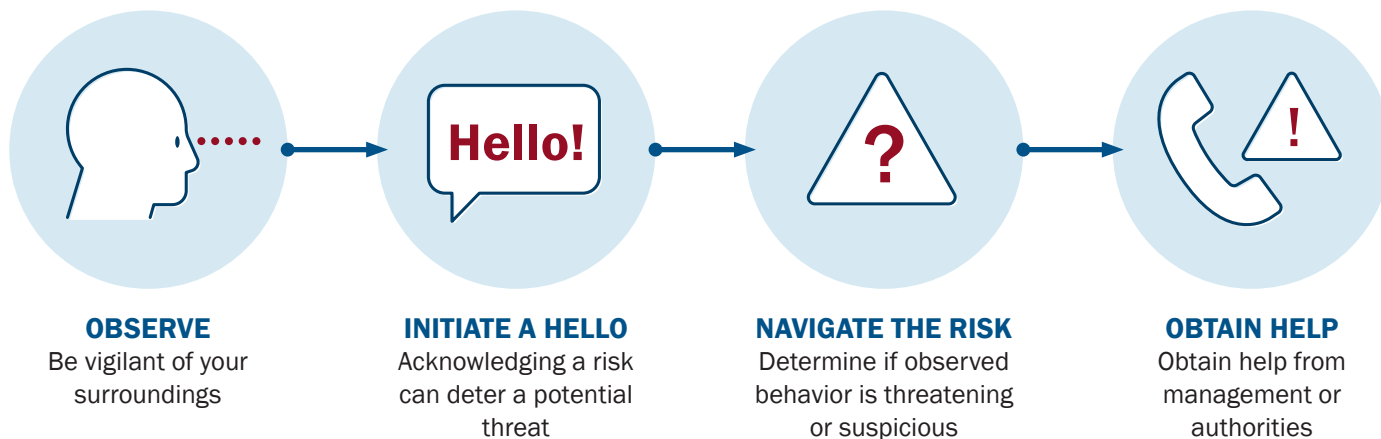
As demonstrated by recent events across the country, terrorists and other violent extremist actors continue attempting to disrupt American society, instill fear, and/or cause harm. These adversaries sometimes identify houses of worship as targets of opportunity given their relative ease of access. Keeping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

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



WHEN USED EFFECTIVELY, THE *RIGHT* WORDS CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL.

Simply saying “Hello” can prompt a casual conversation with an unknown 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 users to manage risk and obtain help when necessary.



The OHNO approach identifies 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.



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 indicators of malicious intent, within appropriate contexts, they can help identify suspicious behavior(s).

BEHAVIOR; IS THE PERSON...

- ... appearing to study security measures in the house of worship? Do they seem to be trying to avoid a camera?
- ... letting their vehicle idle without an apparent reason?
- ... seeming to linger a long time in their vehicle?
- ... trying to go unnoticed?
- ... asking about other members or leadership?
- ... demanding to speak with clergy or house of worship leadership?
- ... repeatedly walking in and out of the service or sanctuary?
- ... attempting to get an usher or someone else to leave the sanctuary with them?
- ... behaving as a 'lookout,' nervously glancing out of doors and windows?
- ... standing alone or facing the congregation when others are seated?

CONTEXT; IS THIS...

- ... an appropriate time for a new guest to be at the house of worship? Is the congregation meeting for a private or public event? Is this event advertised?
- ... person loitering (and not entering the house of worship) without reasonable explanation?
- ... person alone or part of a group?
- ... person familiar with the house of worship? Do they seem to know where they are going?
- ... person familiar to anyone in the community?
- ... person asking questions about house of worship functions, event schedules, or attendance?
- ... person behaving in a 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?
- ... wearing military style gear such as tactical gear?
- ... appearing to conceal something under their clothing?
- ... carrying anything that may seem unusual for the surroundings?



SECURITY TIPS

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

- **If concerning or suspicious activity has been observed outside the house of worship, follow organizational procedures to prohibit access to the facility.** Be sure to report the activity in accordance with your organization's and community's reporting mechanisms to share information and maximize awareness.
- **During services, unless there is a legitimate reason for people to congregate in halls, rooms, and offices, or to stand outside, courteously remind them that the service has started or will be starting shortly.** If there is a reason for concern, calmly remind the person that the services have started. If there is still a clear safety or security concern inside the house of worship, remain with the individual until additional assistance arrives or until the person of concern leaves the facility.



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

Hello!

INITIATE A HELLO

As staff welcome visitors and congregants, a kind greeting with a welcoming tone of voice while maintaining eye contact can make the difference in how an individual 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, try to identify the purpose of their visit before permitting entry into the facility. If entry is permitted, adhere to pre-determined access control procedures to maintain a safe place of worship.

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 of the suspicious behavior(s), and deliberately assess the situation.

Navigate the risk by asking yourself the following questions:

Is anything out of the ordinary?

Do they seem to need assistance?

Is there something concerning or suspicious about this situation?

Is there a potential for danger?

SECURITY TIPS

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

The Power of Hello relies, in part, on an individual's ability to detect behavior that would arouse reasonable suspicion of terrorism, violence, 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 that could suggest 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.



OBTAIN HELP

Be aware, alert, and ready to get help. Leverage relationships with local law enforcement for nonemergency notifications. If staff feel threatened, they should calmly walk away, lock the doors, note a physical description of the individual, and contact 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 start acting 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 concern arises. 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. This includes developing an easy way for everyone to report suspicious activity, including non-threatening suspicious activity or persons.

NOTIFICATION 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?
- 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.

RESOURCES

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

Protecting Faith Based Organizations and Houses of Worship (FBO-HoW) Security Resources

cisa.gov/protecting-houses-worship

Provides resources that inform FBO-HOW security-based decisions. Includes an FBO-HOW Security Self-Assessment Tool and Physical Security Performance Goals for Faith Communities.

Employee Vigilance through the Power of Hello

cisa.gov/power-hello

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

Violence Prevention through De-escalation

cisa.gov/violence-prevention-through-de-escalation

Provides a 13-minute video that merges the concepts within the Power of Hello and De-escalation Series by offering techniques to augment security beyond traditional protocols and help reduce the risk from a potentially volatile situation.

Active Assailant Emergency Action Planning (EAP) Template and Instructional Guide

cisa.gov/active-shooter-emergency-action-planning

Provides organizations and venue operators with tangible guidance to assist users with developing a comprehensive and implementable EAP.

