Recognizing Suspicious Behavior

Suspicious behavior isn't always dramatic. It's often anything that feels *odd, out of place, unusual,* or triggers that inner "gut feeling." While we are called to love others and avoid judgment, we also live in a world where church violence is increasing. Our role is to create a safe, welcoming environment while staying alert to signs that something isn't right.

Suspicious indicators can appear in many forms—people, behaviors, or even environmental issues. Some are obvious, like a broken window or wet floor. Others require awareness, observation, and preparation.

Parking Lot Awareness

The parking lot is often the first place unusual behavior appears. If you see a couple arguing intensely or someone visibly upset, you don't confront them—but you *do* discreetly monitor the situation and notify another team member or church leader.

If you notice visible injuries or concerning behavior:

- Have a **female staff member** quietly check on a woman who appears hurt.
- Have an **elder or pastor** speak privately with the man if needed.
- Always have a plan for how to respond if the situation escalates.

Walk-Ins Seeking Help

Churches frequently receive walk-ins looking for assistance. Most are harmless, but some may be intoxicated, agitated, or unpredictable.

A simple technique:

- A team member positions themselves nearby, within view of the person engaging the walk-in.
- The greeter uses a subtle cue ("Hey Craig, can you grab the blue book?") to signal they need support.
- You remain close, ready to step in or call 9-1-1 if the situation deteriorates.

When speaking with an agitated person, use de-escalation techniques:

- Stay calm and neutral.
- Avoid talking down to them or raising your voice.
- Do not touch them.

- Do not “surround” them with team members but them at a safe distance & ready.
- Ask what they need and how you can help.
- Never allow a single staff member to drive them anywhere.

If available, involve an off-duty officer, firefighter, social worker, or trained volunteer.

Weapons Awareness

Many people legally carry firearms. The key is recognizing **behavior**, not panicking at the sight of a weapon.

Be alert to:

- Heavy bags that seem unusual for the setting.
- Someone approaching the building with a visible weapon.
- Individuals you don’t recognize carrying in a concerning manner.

If a weapon is visible and the person is acting suspicious:

- Locked exterior doors buy you time assuming the possible threat is on the outside.
- Quickly secure sanctuary doors.
- Begin evacuation procedures if needed.
- Assign someone to call 9-1-1 immediately.

Preparation—not panic—is what saves lives.

Training & Preparedness

Scenarios vary, but preparation reduces risk. Your team should:

- Train regularly (at least annually, ideally more often).
- Practice response plans.
- Conduct scenario walk-throughs.
- Seek training from local police or church security coalitions.

A simple rule applies: **When in doubt, call the police out.** When minutes matter, waiting until a situation explodes is not wise.

CHURCH SAFETY ALLIANCE