

## Being Safe Harbor

We face a rising tide of hostile words and actions in our country today. Individuals and groups are being targeted in ways we haven't witnessed in decades. People of good will are searching for ways to respond effectively and to help shift the momentum. *Being Safe Harbor* is a brief collection of informal strategies for use by individuals. (See page 6 for some more formal resources available for schools and workplaces.)

First, let's consider our goals. We intend to:

- Help prevent or limit harm in the moment
- Help the person targeted by harassment know they're not alone
- Offer a healing space and listening ear after an incident occurs
- Shift the culture that says such behavior is normal and acceptable

Second, we note that strategies vary depending on the circumstances of an incident.

We outline suggestions for responding

- In public places when we encounter strangers
- In schools and workplaces
- With friends and family

## Interactions Among Strangers

Perhaps the most frightening examples occur in public places between people who don't know one another. These occasions call for courage and care in our response.

1. Call 911 if it appears the incident could or has escalated into violence
2. Follow the steps outlined in the cartoon by Paris-based artist Maeril on page 6. While written about harassment directed at Muslims, the steps apply to other types of harassment as well.

It is not always wise or necessary to confront the attacker directly. The primary goal is to de-escalate the situation and get the person targeted by the harassment to a safe place.

*Note:* Traditional Muslim custom discourages physical touch from strangers, particularly persons of the opposite gender. Please be mindful of this when offering support.

## In Schools and Workplaces

In schools where violence is likely to occur, follow the steps outlined above.

Some schools and workplaces have environments that are overtly or covertly hostile but do not cross over into physical violence. Part of the cause of the recent upsurge in hostile activity is a perceived permission from the culture that makes the behavior normal and acceptable. The primary goal in these circumstances is to provide emotional support to persons targeted by intolerance and to challenge the culture that says it's ok.

If someone is being harassed:

1. Approach the person and ask if you can help
2. Speak directly to the individual or group engaging in harassment and tell them to stop. Avoid escalating the situation, either at the time or in later conversations. Be firm but do not engage in similar generalizing or name-calling.
3. Engage the person or group being targeted socially at lunch or in other conversations to indicate to them and the larger group that you are in solidarity with them
4. After the incident, ask the person who has been targeted what you can do to help. Don't assume that you know.
5. Report incidents to the appropriate authority yourself, or offer to accompany the person who has been targeted while they do so.

If someone makes a statement that is unintentionally offensive, or a group is expressing disrespectful opinions in a public work or school setting:

1. Have a simple statement prepared to use in such cases. You can say, "That makes me uncomfortable," or "That comment doesn't belong here," or another statement that works for you in that setting.
2. You can say, "I don't agree. Can we revisit this another time?" Don't change your body language or tone of voice. Then move on.
3. Go back and revisit the conversation at another time, preferably in private and one-on-one. Don't alter your relationship with the person or people making the comments. When you cut off relationship you

lose the opportunity to persuade. The goal is to transform the conflict into positive change.

### With Family and Friends

Negative conversations with family and friends are usually *about* a group that is not present rather than directly *toward* an individual who is present. The primary risk in responding is emotional, not physical. We're afraid of losing those relationships or of being alone within the group. At the same time, we may have the opportunity for an extended conversation which does not exist in other settings..

1. Encourage people to express what they want and what they're afraid of. Try to be open and curious about the response.
2. Acknowledge people's feelings, noting that perhaps there is another way to meet those needs.
3. Acknowledge when people are correct in their perceptions. For example, health care professionals *do* encounter instances where Muslim women are not permitted to speak for themselves. Rather than minimizing those events, help people understand the differences between religion and culture. Traditional culture and male dominance are the cause of this problem, not Islam or the Koran.
4. Share your own stories, if you have them. Much of the conversation today has nothing to do with logic and cannot be countered by statistics. Appeal to the goodness in other people by sharing stories and asking for others' wisdom or help in making things better.

5. Learn some basic facts about Islam and Muslims. You don't need to be an expert, but you can clear up some common points of misinformation. See our website at [ctfpmn.org](http://ctfpmn.org) for a list of twelve quick talking points..

### After the incident:

Whether or not you were present when an incident occurred, you can help create a healing space afterward.

1. Offer to listen. Don't minimize the impact of the incident. If you have doubts about the details, save that for a later time.
2. Ask if you can help. Possible strategies include:
  - Physically walking with the person if they feel afraid
  - Helping them find healing therapy, depending on the severity of the incident
  - Offer to assist them in going to authorities
  - Offer to be available for phone conversations, even if a call might come late at night or early in the morning
  - Offer to accompany them in a followup difficult conversation with the person or group engaging in the harassment
3. State your support for the person, and affirm that this incident should not have happened.

\* A great resource is Marshall Rosenberg's work in nonviolent communication. A Jew growing up in riot-torn Detroit in the 1940's, Rosenberg witnessed racial violence firsthand. He devoted his life to creating peace in war-torn countries across the globe. His work provides inspiration and proven strategies for rebuilding a culture of peace. See *Nonviolence: A Language for Life* and other works.

*Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn Singleton provides tested methods for dealing with racism in school settings.

For more resources like this, check our website,  
[congregationstogetherforpeace.org](http://congregationstogetherforpeace.org)