Looking after one another

The safety and security of our faith communities

The
Inter Faith
Network
for the
United Kingdom

- Respond jointly – an attack on one is an attack on all
- Calm in times of tension
- Build on and strengthen existing good inter faith relations

The safety and security of our faith communities

In general, the UK is a place where there are good inter faith relations and where there is respect for the traditions of different faiths and for the beliefs and practices of different communities and for their places of worship.

In times of tension, however, faith communities may find themselves vulnerable in a number of ways. Those who are visibly identifiable as members of a faith may sometimes be verbally or physically harassed or attacked. Hatred or suspicion of a particular faith may be incited. Or the cause may be mindless vandalism. Places of worship, community burial sites and religious symbols may be defaced, damaged or destroyed or precious artefacts stolen. In such situations there needs to be a firm response by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the public and the faith communities themselves.

As faith communities we appreciate the vigilance and support of the public services such as Police, the Fire and Rescue Service and of the public at difficult times and note the many positive ways that organisations are working for community safety at national and local level.

We, as faith communities, also have a role in responding to emergency situations and to inter-community tensions, both as individual communities and – very importantly – together. In our shared society we are deeply interconnected. An attack on one is an attack on all.

These short guidelines have been produced by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, in consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Home Office, the National Fire Chiefs' Council and the National Police Chiefs' Council, to assist in responding together as communities to increase our safety and security.

• Respond jointly – an attack on one is an attack on all

Some attacks, or threats of attack, appear linked to racist or religious hatred or are designed to stir this up. We believe that it is vital for faith community organisations and places of worship to respond jointly and to show solidarity. Some ways to do this are:

- **At a time of tension or following an attack use pre-agreed communication routes**, such as WhatsApp, and email or telephone for mutual support and assistance. Check with your local police force that your place of worship or other faith based premises are part of any existing relevant networks.

- **Report any attacks directly to the police**, either in person, by phone or online (details under Resources).

- **Go together as faith leaders of different faiths** to visit any faith community property that has been attacked or is under threat.

- **Take action as members of local faith communities** – of a kind agreed with the faith community directly affected – in support of a place of worship or faith based premises which has been attacked or vandalised. For example, work with local inter faith groups and others to arrange clean up teams to go and assist if buildings have been defaced or damaged and if the community in question would like help in this way.

- **Meet as faith communities with Police, representatives of the Fire and Rescue Service, the local authority and members of the community safety partnership** to discuss and implement appropriate measures to provide reassurance for the community or communities affected.

- **When reporting an attack or hate incident to the police be clear if it was, in your opinion, motivated by hostility based on faith** (or indeed any other personal characteristic). This includes any instance where it is

believed that someone has been attacked in the mistaken belief that they belong to a community that the attacker is targeting. Offences, including criminal damage and assault, can attract higher sentences if the convicted person demonstrates, or is shown to have been motivated by, hostility based on faith.

- **Report,** where possible and appropriate, social media posts which you believe may contravene the platforms' guidelines, attacking faith groups in your area.

- **Agree and issue joint statements** in response to attacks or crisis situations to support the affected community and defuse tensions (but only if the victims/community wish this).

- **Where appropriate, in particularly serious circumstances, hold events such as vigils** for people to come together to pray, each in their own tradition, be together in silence, or to share and listen together.

- **Use social media and contact the local media** to give publicity to the joint efforts of faith communities to support each other and respond jointly to the situation. It is important that we get the message across about faith communities responding in solidarity. People of non-religious beliefs who are not members of faith traditions may also offer support and this, too, is important to highlight.

- **Lastly, 'Don't wait for hate'.** We need always to challenge misperceptions or misrepresentations of one another – ill-informed stereotyping is damaging to us all. Nip misunderstanding in the bud and replace it with understanding and good relations. More about this can be found in the inter faith relations section under Resources below.

• Calm in times of tension

Problems of the kind discussed here can be the result of a range of factors from racism to social exclusion. They are rarely the fault of faith communities. Sometimes, however, situations can unintentionally be exacerbated by comments from within our faith communities as rumours spread about the likely culprits or perpetrators at times of tension or attack. Or there can be misinformation and disinformation fanned by social media. In such circumstances, it is important to respond with care. Trusted members of communities can help calm some situations and lessen the likelihood of inter community misunderstanding. Swift and well thought through social media messages are also important. It is important to:

- **Check out the accuracy of stories** with trusted contacts in other communities and ensure that inaccurate rumours do not spread.

- **Do as we would be done by** – if people in our own communities have been involved in disrespectful or dangerous behaviour towards members of other communities, make it clear within the community and more widely that this is not acceptable and not condoned by the community.

- **In the event of distorted or misleading interpretations of other faiths** which may be contributing to tensions, tackle these as strongly as we defend the appropriate use of the symbols and beliefs of our own faith.

- **Be very careful in the language used** – avoid generalised, exaggerated or simplistic expressions about other faiths or groups which can cause or inflame tension.

- **Ensure that our members are regularly reminded of the importance of good community relations** and give community recognition to the peacemakers and bridge builders.

• Build on and strengthen existing good inter faith relations

Joint responses to inter community tensions or attacks on community properties or individuals are most effective if they are built on an existing process of strengthening communications and building trust. It is important to:

- **Create strong and positive relationships** within and between faith communities, as well as the wider community.

- **Build long-term personal relationships** between leaders of our diverse faith communities.

- **Develop connections between congregations** of different local places of worship, providing opportunities for members to meet one another, to learn about their different faiths and to encourage personal friendships.

- **Encourage all members of our faith communities to engage** positively and respectfully with each other.

- **Ensure that local inter faith structures are strong**, have active involvement from senior figures of all the local faith communities and are adequately resourced and also encourage our members to be involved in their work.

- **Help develop and run programmes** to promote better understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs – and, in particular, between young people of different backgrounds.

- **Use opportunities like Inter Faith Week** and Mitzvah Day, Sadaqa Day and Sewa Day to highlight this engagement for the common good.

- **Provide training about how to respond to prejudice** and also how to report hate incidents – for example doing a joint training session with other local faith groups or organisations working with other protected groups.

- **Hold a meeting for members of local faith community organisations** to share their knowledge and experience of building security issues.

- **Establish regular meetings with police and local authorities** to keep relevant issues under review and develop partnerships for joint practical action.

- **Maintain awareness of, and act on, legal requirements** for security for places of worship, including against potential terrorist attacks.

- **Develop a communications strategy** – being clear about what we might want to say if problems arise and who might carry the messages both within and beyond the local faith communities (for example through co-ordinated sermons, social media, podcasts and local newspapers and radio).

- **Don't under-estimate your contribution** – our partners such as the emergency services may be stretched during times of tension. The help of faith communities could be vital.

Resources

Reporting hate incidents

Not all hate incidents will amount to criminal offences, but those that do become hate crimes. Hate crimes are any crimes that are targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person's disability, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or transgender identity. They can be committed against a person or property and may include verbal abuse, physical abuse, attacks on premises or online abuse. A victim does not have to be a member of the group at which the hostility is targeted. In fact, anyone could be a victim of a hate crime.

Any form of hate incident can be reported to the bodies listed below.

The police

There are four ways of reporting hate incidents to the police, in person, in writing, by telephone and or on-line.

By telephone
In all parts of the UK victims of hate crime are encouraged to report all instances of hate crime to the police in person or by calling 101. In an emergency call 999.

In person
You can approach a police officer, a police community support officer or visit a police station to report a hate incident.

Via the internet
The UK Government's preferred reporting website is True Vision. Through this you can report hate incidents of any kind. When you do so, the information is conveyed directly to your local police force:

- All English police forces
- Police Scotland
- The Police Service for Northern Ireland
- The Welsh Police/Heddlu forces(bilingual)
- Guernsey Police, The States of Jersey Police and the Isle of Man Police Service.

To use this way of reporting, simply follow the instructions on the home page:
http://www.report-it.org.uk/home

True Vision also has a webpage that signposts victims of hate crime, or those who know someone who is or has been a victim, to organisations that can help. The webpage is regularly updated and can be found by going to: www.report-it.org.uk/organisations_that_can_help

In writing
You can write to your local police constabulary or force by letter or email to tell them about a hate incident. There is a form that can help you to do this on the True Vision website.
https://www.report-it.org.uk/self_reporting_form

Other routes of reporting

There are also a number of third party reporting routes such as those listed below. If you report a hate incident to these the details will automatically be provided to the Police.

- Stop Hate UK:
  http://www.stophateuk.org/report-hate-crime/
  Areas where the scheme operates are listed there.
  Telephone (24 hours): 0800 138 1625
  Text (24 hours): 07717 989 025

- Crimestoppers Report crime anonymously 24/7 at
  https://crimestoppers-uk.org/ Telephone: 0800 555 111
  Not for reporting items requiring urgent police response.

- The Community Security Trust, through which anti-Semitic hate and attacks on those perceived to be Jewish can be reported.
  Emergency number: (24 hours) – 0800 032 3263.
  Non-emergency: London (office hours) 020 8457 9999 and Manchester (office hours) 0161 792 6666 and
  https://cst.org.uk/antisemitism/report-antisemitism

- TellMAMA (Measuring Anti Muslim Attacks) TellMAMA records and report hate incidents aimed at Muslims in the UK, including those perceived to be Muslims.
  Telephone: 0800 456 1226, SMS: 0115 707 0007,

WhatsApp: 0734 184 6086. E-mail: info@tellmamauk.org http://tellmamauk.org/

- SikhGuard is an initiative that aims to encourage the reporting of hate crime by members of the Sikh community. https://sikhguard.org/

- To report arson or a deliberate fire setting go to: https://forms.theiline.co.uk/firestoppers This may be done anonymously.

Cyber-attacks

To report a cyber attack, visit: https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/reporting-fraud-and-cyber-crime
You can also report attacks through your local police station.

Online hate crimes

To report online hate crimes visit: https://www.met.police.uk/ro/report/hate-crime/hc-av1/report-hate-crime/
Or
Select the 'online' option when you report here: https://www.police.uk/ro/report/hate-crime/hc-av1/report-hate-crime/

Potential or actual terrorist activity

If you suspect someone is involved in terrorism, contact the police or ring the Anti-Terrorist hotline: 0800 789 321. You can remain anonymous. https://act.campaign.gov.uk/

You can also report threats to national security to: https://www.gov.uk/report-suspicious-activity-to-mi5

If you see or hear something suspicious, report in confidence to https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/awareness/action-counters-terrorism-act-report-suspicious-activity or 0800 789321. However, in an emergency, always call 999.

If you've found any pictures, videos or content online that you think could be illegal, harmful or promoting terrorism, please report them using the Home Office's online form at https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism.

Hate attacks, discrimination and human rights

If a person believes that, through a hate incident, they have been discriminated against or that their human rights have been breached the following EHRC pages may be of assistance: https://equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/getting-help-and-advice

Practical pointers on strengthening security

There are a number of UK wide websites that will help you review your security:

https://www.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/

ProtectUK is the central hub for Counter Terrorism advice: https://www.protectuk.police.uk/
It has a guidance section at https://www.protectuk.police.uk/guidance

Each police force area of the UK has Counter Terrorism Security Advisers (CTSA) from whom you can request security guidance: https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/risk/working-counter-terrorism-security-advisors-ctsas

It is important that you have appropriate internet security software in place.
For further advice you can consult: https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/cyber-crime and https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/

It is important to check these websites regularly as the information and advice is updated from time to time. However, you should do all that you can to improve your security using the existing guidance even if you know new guidance is to be published.

Creating and strengthening good inter faith relations locally

Taking part in initiatives which promote greater understanding and work to counteract prejudice and hatred is an important step in working to stem hate crime.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between people of different faiths in the UK. It links a wide range of organisations including: national representative bodies from the different faith communities; national, regional and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies. It provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs; advises on multi faith projects and inter faith issues; publishes materials to aid work in the religious and inter faith sectors; fosters inter faith cooperation on social issues; and holds regular meetings where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together. http://www.interfaith.org.uk

To find a local inter faith group in the UK, use the Inter Faith Network's locator webpage: www.interfaith.org.uk/locator

If there is no existing group in your area you may want to set up a local inter faith body. For guidance follow this link to setting up and maintaining inter faith initiatives: www.interfaith.org.uk/LIFGuide

For information about Inter Faith Week and how to take part, visit www.interfaithweek.org

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Home Office

CPS

NFCC National Fire Chiefs Council

NPCC National Police Chiefs' Council