

Extract from *Looking After one Another: The Safety and Security of our Faith Communities*, Inter Faith Network for the UK and partners.

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 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:

- Faith leaders go together to visit any faith community property that has been attacked or is under threat
- Faith groups contact one another by email or telephone in any time of crisis or tension for mutual support and assistance
- Take action - of a kind agreed with the faith community directly affected - in support of a place of worship which has been attacked or vandalised
- Meet with police, representatives of the local fire and rescue service and local authorities to discuss and implement appropriate measures to provide reassurance for the community or communities affected
- Encourage swift reporting of the incident to the police. Some offences, such as criminal damage and assault, now receive higher sentences if the convicted person demonstrates, or is shown to have been motivated by, hostility based on faith. When reporting an incident to the police, it is important to make clear at the time of reporting that you consider this to have been the case.
- Contact the local media and ask them to give publicity to the joint efforts of faith communities to support each other and respond jointly to the situation
- Agree and issue joint statements in response to crisis situations to support the affected community and defuse tensions (but only if the community wishes this)
- 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 the community in question would like help in this way
- Work jointly to sponsor fund-raising efforts in response to crises
- Where appropriate, in particularly serious circumstances, hold events such as vigils for people to come together to pray, each in their own tradition

Build on existing good inter community relations

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

- Develop good relations with neighbours
- Build long-term personal relationships between faith community leaders

- Develop opportunities for members of different communities to meet one another, to learn about their different faiths and to encourage personal friendships
- Always challenge misperceptions or misrepresentations of one another – ill informed stereotyping is damaging to us all
- Ensure that local inter faith structures are strong, have active involvement from senior figures of all the local faith communities and are well-resourced
- Run programmes to promote better understanding between people of different faiths – and, in particular, between young people of different faith backgrounds
- Establish regular meetings with police and local authorities to keep relevant issues under review and develop partnerships for joint practical action
- Ensure that each place of worship has a list of the faith bodies and places of worship in the local authority area and a way to contact them in times of crisis by email or telephone
- Develop a communications strategy – what might we want to say if problems arise? Who might carry the messages (for example through co-ordinated sermons and local newspapers and radio)?

Calm in times of tension

Problems of the kind discussed in this leaflet 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 themselves as rumours spread at times of tension or attack about the likely culprits or perpetrators. In such circumstances, trusted members of communities can help calm some situations and lessen the likelihood of inter community misunderstanding.

- 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 condoned.
- 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 we use - 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