



**Anglican**  
**Diocese of Dunedin**  
[www.calledsouth.org.nz](http://www.calledsouth.org.nz)



# Safety in Ministry



**Keeping Yourself and Others Safe**



Notes from Diocese of Dunedin Training Session on the following topics:

- [A quick \(Safety\) quiz](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- What are your safety concerns? (Group feedback – no notes)
- [De-escalation techniques](#)
- [Keeping Safe in the Community](#)
- [Keeping safe at Home](#)

Risk Assessment Resources:

- [Risk Assessment for Community Contact](#)
- [Risk Assessment for Lone or Home Working](#)



## Quick “How Safe Am I” Quiz

1. Think about your main work/ministry environments. Can you:

**Yes**

**No**

- Identify accessible, safe emergency escape routes?

☐☐

- Say where first aid kits are kept?

☐☐

- Say who/where to report to if there is a problem?

☐☐

- Outline how you would summon assistance?

☐☐

2. You notice a person is getting quite upset and is starting to pace around and talk with a loud voice. What would you do?

- a. Ignore them; keep doing what you are doing.
- b. Ask them to stop doing this as it is irritating you.
- c. Ask them if anything is wrong and can you help?
- d. Tell them to leave or you will call the police?

3. Something has gone wrong, and you feel that you are in danger from a person i.e., they may physically lunge at you. Would you...

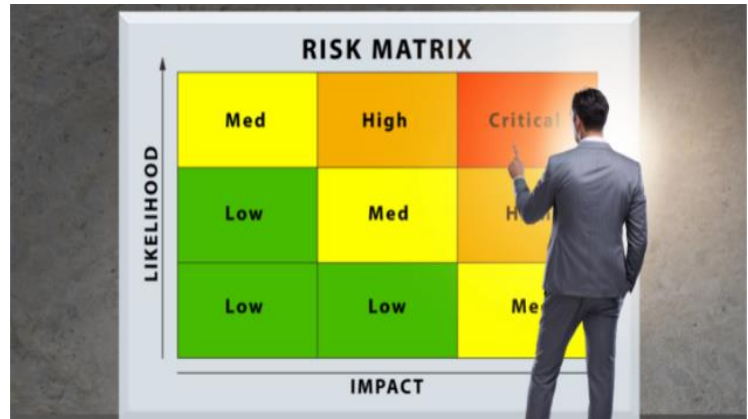
- a. Shout for help?
- b. Make a loud noise/call attention to yourself with something else to hand?
- c. Dial 111 and ask for assistance?
- d. Remove yourself from the location is it is safe to do?
- e. All/any of the above?

4. Think some more about your work environment. How many things can you identify that could be used as weapons by someone? Write them down below...



## Introduction

Personal Safety is something that's important, but at times overlooked for people in ministry. We are so used to being open and available to people, but at times we can find ourselves in tricky situations without having thought out "what would I do". At other times, we might be caught by surprise by an unexpected encounter and feel quite vulnerable. This workshop attempts to get us into having safety as a "sixth sense" i.e., encourage us to assess and respond to what is going on around us to keep ourselves and others safe. It gives some tips and tools to help you think about risk assessment.



*This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-ND*

If any clergy or lay person has an unexpected and distressing encounter with someone that you are having pastoral contact with, debriefing with another person is recommended<sup>1</sup>. If you need to arrange for extra supervision, contact the Diocesan Office as the Pension Committee may be able to assist in paying for these costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Reflection-Debriefing Template

### Scene setting:

Describe the event or process. What was the context? Was this a situation/experience I had prior knowledge/skills in? Are there any other statements from others or information that will help me to set the scene?

### Reflecting:

What was I trying to achieve? Was there any part of what happened that I feel is particularly significant/important? What were the consequences of my actions for everyone involved? (an individual, the wider church-group, colleagues, myself). Do I have any feelings/responses about what happened? What has been the effect on the other person or my colleagues? What factors/previous knowledge could have influenced me? What alternative actions could I have taken?

### Learning:

What have I learnt? What went well... and not so well? Can I make any links with my existing knowledge/skills/evidence? How do I feel now? Could I have acted differently? How will this influence my future working? What has this taught me about my own beliefs, values and ethics?

### Acting:

What do I need to do next?

Can I put this learning into practice in any other situation i.e. are there any "links" I need to make between this and something similar?



## Safety in Ministry: De-escalation Basic Tips and Techniques

### Definition of De-escalation

*A complex interaction process between an instigating person and another, enabling the other person to feel more empowered and consequently to be less likely to act aggressively. To (cause) to become less dangerous or difficult*

### Introduction

Aggressive behaviour rarely comes “out of the blue” but is part of a process. Usually, it occurs as a progression from relative calm to increasing agitation, sometimes culminating in abrupt, aggressive behaviour. Looking back, it is usually possible to review what the warning signs and stressors were that lead to an incident.

Knowing about the aggression cycle can help us assess a situation and intervene appropriately. Effective de-escalation skills are based on effective communication and an effective (therapeutic) use of self, that is, calling on all your skills of empathy, listening and pastoral care. It works best if you work on developing rapport with people and constantly assess that your



interactions are helping to calm things down: if they are not, you may find you are actually “winding things up” and could be making things worse. People can often feel afraid, disempowered, and desperate: this is your chance to give them what they need to be able to regain control over a difficult situation. **NB:** if you are in a situation where you are dealing with someone who is not known to you e.g., in a community setting where confronted by an unknown aggressive person, you may need to modify your response (some tips for this are included later).



## Some Important Definitions

**Proxemics** (personal space) – the proximity/distance between you and another

*Question: What is this for you? How can you assess what it is for others?*

**Kinesics** (body posture) – the position of your body in relation to another person. Think in terms of what might feel safe for another person (moving your body to be at the same level as theirs) or threatening (towering over them, having an aggressive stance).

*Question: How can your body help to calm... or inflame a situation? How else can you use your body to “stay safe” and keep another person safe?*

CRISIS			
Four Levels of Crisis Development Summary			
1. Anxiety	→		Supportive
2. Defensive	→		Directive
3. Acting Out	→		Remove yourself
4. Tension Reduction	→		Communication

## Four levels of Crisis Intervention

Adapted from resources accessed from: <http://www.crisisprevention.com>

### 1. Anxiety Level

You will usually see this first – people can become more anxious and restless, a “non-directed expenditure of energy”.

You may not know what’s causing it but should be obvious they are acting differently.

*Response:*

- Supportive, empathetic, use active listening skills, non-judgmental.
- Most potentially difficult situations can be diffused at this stage – if left to fester, a situation can escalate to the next level.



## 2. Defensive Level

This stage is the beginning of a significant loss of control or rationality and has a variety of verbal and non-verbal cues:

- Belligerent, hostile, challenging (verbal)
- Voice tone, proximity and body posture cues (non-verbal) e.g., someone is literally “in your face”.

All of this can result in testing you and your limits.

### *Response*

- A directive, limit setting approach is the best way, as often what a person really wants is some structural limits to help them regain rational control.
- Set clear, simple limits that are reasonable.
- Make sure the limits you set can be enforced.
- Make sure the limits are objective, and that the person knows that they are responsible for the consequences of their behaviour.
- Give a rationale for the limits e.g. “Your language is upsetting others, there is no need to shout. If you can’t lower your voice, you will have to leave.”

If limits are unreasonable or not enforced, things may escalate to the next stage...

## 3. The “Acting Out” Person

This is defined as total loss of control, which usually involves physical aggression i.e. the person can’t control themselves and it escalates into assaulting others or the environment.

### *Response*

- Remove yourself from the situation (make sure you always have an escape route).  
Never turn your back on someone, but step away with them in view.
- Ensure others nearby are safe and leave the immediate area.
- Call for help.
- This is potentially a case for police involvement – DO NOT attempt to touch or restrain a person yourself.

## 4. Tension Reduction

This is a physical and emotional experience that results from total expenditure of energy for someone who has been acting out and all of their energy has been depleted. They may have had an encounter with the police or some other intervention to keep them and others safe. You may not be around at this stage, but generally once someone has expended a huge amount of energy and starting to regain some control/rationality, it is often characterised by fear, confusion and remorse.



*Response*

- Keep communicating and re-establishing a rapport.
- Keep the person informed about what is happening and what is happening next.

## Using De-escalation skills

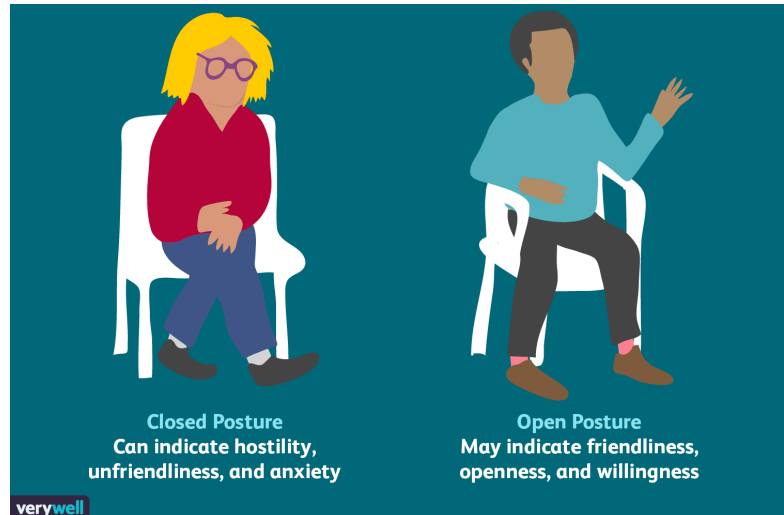
1. **Manage others in the environment** – don't play to a crowd, ask some to leave, call on the assistance of others.
2. **Encourage thought** – get someone to talk about what they are feeling and what the consequences are of any actions they may be contemplating.
3. **Give clear instructions** – the rule is, the more agitated the person, the less they will be able to process information. Keep sentences short, with not too much information. Be direct... but non-threatening.
4. **Eye contact and body posture** – maintain eye contact, but don't "stare someone out". Keep your body posture open and relaxed e.g., hands open, palms down and open towards the person, but make sure you are ready to step away if you need to. Turn your body so one side is facing toward someone, with one foot forward and the other back. This allows you to get away but also protects your front internal organs if anyone lunges at you.
5. **Personalise yourself** – let them know that they are dealing with you i.e. another person who sometimes has bad days, can feel angry or sad... and who knows about them (or people like them) and what they need.
6. **Show concern** – use empathy, ask about how they are feeling, show you understand and are on their side.
7. **Model the behaviour you want** – don't shout back if they are shouting at you, but respond in a clear, calm manner.
8. **Use of touch** – rule of thumb is, don't. People can see this as patronising or that you are taking some kind of "control" over them. What you may think is comforting and reassuring if initiated by you, it can be perceived as threatening and aggressive.





## De-escalation checklist

- Awareness of self.
- Relaxed and open body posture
- Stand at non-threatening angle.
- Allow personal space and time.
- Encourage face to face communication.
- Where appropriate encourage eye contact (be aware of cultural differences that might constrain this).
- When you need to move, move slowly.
- Respond to physical signs of relaxation i.e., mirror relaxing postures.
- Where possible encourage the person to sit with you.
- Modulate your tone of voice – calming.
- Therapeutic use of touch – Again, the general rule of thumb is “hands off”. You will only consider this if you know them well and you are sure it is what they really want i.e. ask them.



## Some potential Weapons in a Workplace or home...

- General Office supplies (pens/pencils, scissors, staplers etc)
- Cleaning supplies (brooms, mops, buckets)
- Computers and other work-related equipment
- Church furniture and fittings e.g. stools, candlesticks, candle snuffers, vases
- Lanyards with a nametags or ID cards with pins
- Books or manuals
- Cups, glasses, plates, utensils
- Telephones (fixed or mobile)
- Electrical cords
- Other objects specific to your environment





## **Safety In ministry: Keeping yourself safe in the community**

- Complete a risk assessment before you leave to visit or connect with some in the community. Consider the area visiting you are visiting, other potential people or pets in the house. An example of one follows that can be useful in terms of helping you to “think risk assessment”.
- Have a buddy system (a designated safety person) in place that works. You should be leaving information behind that says thing like:
  - Who is present at a meeting or visit
  - Time of departure
  - Time of visit
  - Transport arrangements (car details)
  - Name and address of person you are seeing and their phone number (if applicable)
  - The number of the phone you are carrying
  - Expected time of return
- Always look ahead for hazards and potential danger situations – if unsure, have an identified escape route and place of safety (e.g. locked car!!).
- Carry your keys in your hand before opening car door – it means no fumbling, plus (in a funny way) can be a bit of a deterrent!
- If something is present that makes you feel unsafe (e.g. a dog), ask the person you are visiting to put it somewhere else.
- Have some phrases up your sleeve you can respond with if you have an immediate threat – not more than 3-4 words at a time. Don’t negotiate or get into any kind of conversations, say what you want to happen, be like a broken record (i.e. repeat and repeat). Suggestions are:
  - Stop that now.
  - Move away now.
  - I’m calling the police.
  - Leave now please.
- Never touch a person or let them touch you. Always maintain a distance of at least 2 metres and if they try and come closer move back. Open your hands and face them towards the person, take one step back and position yourself side on to the person (if someone takes a swing and you can shield yourself, or run away!)
- Don’t be reluctant to call for help, make a loud noise (e.g., startle alarm) if you need to... it can help deter the person.



## Risk Assessment for Community Contact

**This should be completed prior to all Community Contacts**

Is the person/family known to you or the Church?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there known child protection issues, or are they a vulnerable adult?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Do they or anyone in the family have a history of violence?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Do they or anyone in the family have a history of mental illness?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Are they males between the ages of 15-30 or are there males of this age in the family?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Do they/the family live in a high-risk area/neighbourhood or isolated location?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Do they or anyone in the family known to misuse drugs or alcohol?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Is there a possible risk from other occupants?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Can you get out of the environment quickly if you need to?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown

**Are there any other factors to be considered?**

Inappropriate or impulsive behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Domestic violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Potential for violent behaviour/use of weapons	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Paranoid/persecutory ideas/signs of anger/frustration	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Dangerous dogs/pets	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Visits after 4pm in winter months or adverse weather	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
General Environmental Hazards (unsafe access, clutter etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Transport Issues i.e. safety within cars with a person	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
Person's communication/comprehension	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown

If "yes" to any of the above, provide details here:

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## Safety in Ministry: Keeping Yourself Safe Working from Home

- Complete a risk assessment for your home situation. An example of one follows that can be useful in terms of helping you to “think risk assessment”.
- Make sure that your home is secure – look at windows, doors, lighting: could anyone gain access to you if you don’t let them in through the main entrance? Do you leave a light on in the porch/by the main door, or security lighting that activates if anyone comes close?
- Can you view people before you open the door or communicate via an intercom system? If not, call out “who is it?” before you answer? If you don’t know who they are or have any safety concerns, try a delaying tactic, for example:
  - Ask them to wait for a moment as you are doing something you need to attend to “I’m caught up in something, can you come back?”.
  - “Can you meet me by the...” (front gate, front of the church – anywhere more visible and safer).
- Consider if you should ask to have some extra security systems installed e.g. a web camera, peep hole, intercom system, external security screen door.
- If you do end up inviting someone in, direct them where to go to talk to/meet with you. Only use a room that you have an alternative exit from or make sure you are between the person and the door.
- Consider purchasing a startle alarm. You can use this to create a noise that will “startle” a person away from you if they become aggressive and gives you time to get away.
- On your mobile phone, check out the latest personal safety apps e.g. Hollie Guard  
<https://hollieguard.com/>

**iPhone download:**

<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/hollie-guard-personal-safety/id1033851499>

**Android download:**

[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mm.hollieguard&hl=en\\_GB&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mm.hollieguard&hl=en_GB&gl=US)

**Check out your phone’s emergency assistance (111) features** e.g. Android phones, 5 taps on the screen will activate this, for iPhones you can set up Emergency SOS features in your settings (search for Emergency SOS) i.e., press the side button 5 times to sound an alarm and call emergency services.



## Risk Assessment for Lone or Home Working

Complete this risk assessment and share it with Wardens or other relevant people.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Location of Lone Working Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Assessment \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Do you ever work in an office or at home alone?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you work outside "normal" working hours?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you have adequate security provisions at the entrance to your office or home*? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is there poor access to the building?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you work in a confined space with only one entrance/exit?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

\* Visibility of visitors e.g. door peep hole, security-screen doors, alternative (safe) entrance, alternative escape route

### Do you have any existing safety measures in place?

- |   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Do you have web cameras or other devices for viewing or speaking to guests?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | Do you have any communication (e.g. emergency text) systems that you know someone will respond to? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you have any entrance security systems (swipe access, quick release locks) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | Do you have access to information/training about basic safety? (see overleaf)                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is there security lighting around entrances?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | Do you have knowledge-skills on deescalating a tricky situation?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you use reporting/checking in systems?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | Anything else you have? (Note below)   |  |
| Do you have a personal startle alarm and know how to use it?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |  |  |

If "yes" to any of the above, provide details here:



In your opinion, are your safety systems adequate?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

If "No", note what modifications or actions are needed below:

**Modifications/Actions:**

**Further Information and Resources:**

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust** <https://www.suzylamplugh.org> in their "Help and Advice" tag have personal safety advice and Personal Safety and Lone Working Tools, including apps and other devices.

**Royal College of Nursing** has information on Personal Safety when working alone. Much of this advice can be translated into your own setting: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/-/media/royal-college-of-nursing/documents/publications/2016/september/005716.pdf>

**Diocese of Dunedin Website Health and Safety page** <https://www.calledsouth.org.nz/health-safety/> : Has a link to a personal safety video produced by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust: <https://youtu.be/ApfYPyvEDSY> - timings are noted for when various sections start.

**Safelet NZ** <https://safelet.co.nz/> have a Personal Safety Alarm. The Diocesan Office may be able to assist in funding for this.

**Safety Alarms** – a range of these are available and will make a noise when pulled from a key chain or something else e.g. Sabre alarm <https://www.fitness.net.nz/sabre/>, personal alarms from Etsy [https://www.etsy.com/nz/market/personal\\_alarm](https://www.etsy.com/nz/market/personal_alarm) or Mitre 10 <https://www.mitre10.co.nz/shop/quell-personal-panic-alarm/p/386972>. Purchase of one of these is a legitimate work expense you can claim back.

**Ten Personal Safety Tips for your everyday life:** From (US Based ) Safe Streets: <https://youtu.be/4myMBdBNxwQ>

**Prepared by: Andrew Metcalfe, Registrar, Diocese of Dunedin, June 2023.**