

Bystanders Are Key To Countering Terrorism

Bystanders^a play an important role in public safety because efforts to prevent terrorism are enhanced by the recognition, intercession, and reporting to authorities of pertinent concerning behaviors and indicators. Family, peers, community leaders (religious figures, teachers, coaches, work supervisors), and strangers are all examples of bystanders who may observe suspicious behaviors reasonably indicative of terrorism or criminal related activity. To enable disruption of attacks, bystanders must understand the important role they play in terrorism prevention and the available opportunities to report pertinent suspicious information. Public safety personnel are key to providing guidance on what constitutes suspicious activity, how to improve bystander awareness, and helping the public overcome resistance to reporting.

- Bystanders who witnessed concerning activities or behaviors and were willing to report them to proper authorities have enabled the disruption of terrorist plots. Their reporting triggered early intervention by community members or law enforcement that intercepted the potential for violence.
- Bystanders may be reluctant to report behaviors indicative of terrorism for a variety of reasons, including concern their loved one could be arrested, fear of being perceived as alarmist, potentially slandering an innocent person, or based on negative perceptions of law enforcement.

BYSTANDER ACTIONS: A 2019 FBI study of 52 selected lone offender terrorism cases from 1972 to 2015 reveals that in 62 percent of the cases, at least one person knew the offender was supportive of violence in furtherance of a violent ideology. In addition, in 25 percent of the cases, at least one other individual became aware of the offenders' research, planning, or preparations for their attack. The study further reveals that those who reported their concerns, reported them:*

- To the offender directly: 54 percent
- To family: 40 percent
- To friends: 19 percent
- To an authority figure: 33 percent
- Through an anonymous tip: 2 percent
- By other means: 4 percent
- No action taken: 23 percent

*The sum of all percentages listed above is greater than 100 percent because bystanders may have reported their concerns to multiple people, or multiple people may have expressed concerns about the same offender.

^aIndividuals whose relationship and level of interaction with a person of concern enables them to witness or become aware of activities or behavior reasonably indicative of terrorism or criminal activity.



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- Bystanders may not recognize the importance of their observations or know the reporting mechanisms available to them. Community engagement and training could help provide bystanders the appropriate knowledge, tools, and willingness to increase the likelihood they will report concerns to authorities.
- Reporting mechanisms that are secure, safe, anonymous, easily accessible, and credible likely will remove potential barriers and may increase bystander reporting. Providing multiple channels to share concerns with trusted interlocutors outside law enforcement—such as religious leaders or a community ombudsman—also could increase reporting rates, particularly among family members and peers who are the most hesitant to involve law enforcement.
- Developing intervening programs other than arrest for individuals at risk of committing terrorism or violence would probably encourage bystanders to report. Intervention programs typically use social workers, mental health professionals, employment and family counselors, and law enforcement personnel to develop individualized approaches to steer an individual away from violent extremism.

CATEGORIES OF BYSTANDERS:

- **FAMILY:**
 - Parents
 - Siblings
 - Extended family
- **PEERS:**
 - Close Friends
 - Acquaintances
 - Coworkers
 - Classmates
- **AUTHORITY FIGURES:**
 - Law enforcement officers
 - Educators
 - Workplace supervisors
 - Health professionals
 - Religious leaders
- **STRANGERS:** Commercial company employees (such as store or company employees who sell weapons or precursor materials for explosives)

RESOURCES:

- **INTERVENTION PROGRAMMING:**
 - The **Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program** provides funding for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education with funds to establish or enhance capabilities to prevent targeted violence and terrorism. Some of these resources are dedicated specifically towards empowering the reporting of bystanders. <https://www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants>
 - Officers of the **Miami-Dade Police Department's Threat Management Section** are trained in crisis-intervention techniques for at-risk individuals, including providing them preventative mental health and social service resources. Parts of the program encourage bystander reporting. This training program may serve as a model for localities that have no analogous programs. <https://www.miamidade.gov/global/police/contact-police.page>



- **REPORTING:**
 - **FBI Terrorism Online Tips:** <https://tips.fbi.gov/>
 - **If you see something, say something®:** <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>
 - **Nationwide SAR Initiative:** <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>
- **TRAINING**
 - **FBI Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC)** is a national-level, multiagency, multidisciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence through the application of behavior-based operational support, training, and research. Encouraging bystander reporting is one of their top missions. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made through the Behavioral Analysis Unit Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>
 - **FBI Local Field Office Behavioral Threat Management Coordinators** - All 56 FBI field offices have coordinators who handle support and training requests from agencies in their local area across programs, threat issues, and investigative efforts. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>
- **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**
 - **FBI's Lone Offender: A Study of Lone-Offender Terrorism in the United States (1972-2015):** <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/lone-offender-terrorism-report-111319.pdf>
 - **Homegrown Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators - 2019 Edition:** <http://go.usa.gov/xEKgd>





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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS.

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