

BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROTESTS INVOLVING HATE AND EXTREMISM

In recent years, the ADL Center on Extremism has tracked an alarming number of demonstrations and protests involving hate and extremism. These events often attract individuals looking for physical or verbal confrontation, including some who may carry firearms. The presence of counter-protesters can increase the likelihood of physical confrontations.

If your institution or community is the target of such a demonstration or protest, these guidelines may be of assistance.

Note: This resource is not intended to provide legal advice. Please check with your own legal counsel for proper legal guidance.

Before a Protest

- **Alert** your colleagues and community to the event, providing the specific location, time and information about who may attend.
- **Educate** your contacts about the event – ADL can provide background information on extremist groups, conspiracy theories, symbols and narratives that might be used during the demonstration or protest.
- **Share** this “Best Practices” resource with your network to encourage a unified community response.
- **Connect** with law enforcement if you have reason to believe you or your community are at risk of physical harm.
- **Consider** planning a unity event at a separate location for community members to come together and show support for those who may be targeted. Consider sharing information about this event with law enforcement if you feel that it may attract unwanted attention.
- **Review** security procedures - for protests at a building or institution
 - **Ensure** that safety protocols are in place.
 - **Practice** procedures and review rules with all staff, especially security staff.
 - **Test** your security devices, including locks and alarm systems.
 - **Check** that unused or unmonitored entrances are closed and inaccessible from the outside.
 - **Consider** whether to close the building during the event if you are concerned about ensuring safety of personnel or property.

Before a Protest (continued)

- **Consult** with legal counsel - for protests at a building or institution
 - **Reach out** to a lawyer with First Amendment experience who can help you understand where people may lawfully protest and what rights you have. If your institution does not have legal counsel with relevant expertise, you may be able to find legal assistance through your local bar association.
 - **Note** that hate speech and expression (i.e. distributing flyers and other materials; chanting; holding signs or photos) is likely legally protected speech.
- **Prepare** a media response
 - **Do not alert** the media yourself. This often only gives extremists the attention they are looking for.
 - **Be ready** to speak to the media. If reporters do cover the event, you might wish to have a short, prepared statement to share. The statement should:
 - **Reject** the demonstrators' extremist, hateful or conspiratorial messages without restating their claims;
 - **Demonstrate** support for targeted members of the community;
 - **Reaffirm** your community's values as being inclusive and safe for all.
- **Support** targeted community members – whether by promoting a solidarity event at a separate location, sending a message of support to your network or listening to experiences of affected community members, it is important to show those who are impacted that they are not alone.

During a Protest

- **Avoid** the event area if at all possible.
- **Do not engage** directly with individual protestors.
- **Consider participating** in counter-protests and unity events *if it is safe to do so*.
- **Contact law enforcement** if you feel that you are in physical danger.
- **Contact ADL** for additional support.

After a Protest

- **Provide** your community with a summary of the event and reiterate your support for impacted community members.
- **Only if contacted** by the media, share your prepared statement with reporters.
- **Review** your security procedures to see if any policies need to be updated based on new information/issues that arose during the event.
- **Turn** the event into a teachable moment for your community – bring in educational resources and organize community events that honor your goal of being inclusive and safe for all. ADL can help you select respected and high-quality programming.
- **Contact** ADL for additional support.

Remember: Every protest is different and not every recommendation above applies to every situation. If you have questions about the specific details of a particular event, please contact your local ADL Regional Office at <https://www.adl.org/about/regional-offices>.