



DISCERN Situational Awareness

See Clearly. Respond Wisely.

Observe. Discern. Act. Reassess.

PAGE 1 - SEE CLEARLY

PURPOSE OF THIS QUICK REFERENCE

Situational awareness means noticing what is happening around you, recognizing meaningful changes in behavior or circumstances, and responding appropriately to what you actually observe.

In a ministry environment, situational awareness is not about treating unfamiliar people as suspicious or trying to determine someone's intentions. It is about remaining attentive while continuing to welcome, serve, and care for people.

A concern is not necessarily a threat. Something may deserve attention without representing danger.

The goal is simple: See clearly enough to respond wisely.

WELCOMING AND WATCHFUL

Churches should be welcoming environments. Situational awareness should support that mission, not work against it.

You can greet someone warmly while noticing what is happening around you. You can assist a family while recognizing that a secured door has been left open. You can listen compassionately to an upset guest while recognizing that the interaction is escalating.

Being watchful does not mean expecting something bad to happen. It means being present enough to recognize when something needs your attention.

OBSERVE BEHAVIOR - NOT APPEARANCE

Focus on what someone is doing, saying, attempting, or changing rather than assumptions about the person.

- Actions and behavior
- Words or specific statements
- Attempts to enter controlled or restricted areas
- Interactions with other people
- Changes in behavior or emotional intensity
- Relevant objects or environmental conditions
- Activity inconsistent with established procedures or circumstances

Someone being unfamiliar, looking different from those around them, appearing nervous, or simply being somewhere you did not expect does not by itself establish a safety concern.

Describe what you observe before deciding what it requires.

KNOW WHAT IS NORMAL

Situational awareness begins with understanding the environment around you.

What is normal changes by location, time, activity, and circumstance.

A busy lobby before service is different from the same lobby during worship. Normal activity in a children's check-in area is different from normal activity near administrative offices. An exterior door may normally be open while people are arriving but secured after service begins.

A baseline describes what normally happens in an environment - not what the people there normally look like.

Ask: What normally happens here? What is happening now? What changed?

A change from normal does not automatically mean danger. It may simply deserve closer attention.

WHEN SHOULD I PAY CLOSER ATTENTION?

These observations are not proof that someone is dangerous. Their significance depends on the circumstances, what is changing, and what is actually occurring.

ACCESS

Attempts to enter controlled areas without following established procedures; repeated attempts at secured doors; following others through controlled entrances; or efforts to bypass normal access procedures.

PERSISTENCE

Repeated concerning behavior after reasonable direction; continued attempts to obtain access; or behavior that becomes more concerning over time.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

An unexpectedly unsecured door, blocked exit, damaged lock, unattended item in concerning circumstances, developing hazard, unusual crowd movement, or another meaningful environmental change.

ESCALATION

Increasing anger, aggression, threatening statements, fixation on a person or objective, confrontational behavior, or a noticeable increase in the intensity of an interaction.

VULNERABILITY OR NEED

Someone who appears lost, distressed, confused, separated from family, medically impaired, or otherwise may need assistance. Awareness helps us recognize people who need help - not only potential safety concerns.

CONCERNING COMMUNICATION

Specific threats, statements about harming someone, references to violence, or other communication that reasonably raises a safety concern.

WHEN SOMETHING REQUIRES YOUR ATTENTION

OBSERVE	DISCERN	ACT	REASSESS
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Observe what is happening. Discern what the situation requires. Act appropriately within your role. Reassess as circumstances change.



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Empowering Safety; Anchored in Faith

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**PAGE 2 - RESPOND
WISELY**

OBSERVE

What am I actually seeing or hearing?

Start with facts.

- What happened?
- What changed?
- What did I actually see or hear?
- Where is it happening?
- Who or what is involved?
- Is the behavior continuing, stopping, or changing?

DESCRIBE BEFORE YOU INTERPRET

Instead of:
"There's a suspicious person near children's ministry."

Describe the behavior:
"An adult near the children's entrance has attempted two secured doors and tried to follow a family through the controlled entrance."

The second description gives others information they can use without guessing the person's intentions.

DISCERN

What does this situation require?

- Could ordinary circumstances reasonably explain what I am observing?
- What specifically changed or caused concern?
- Is the behavior escalating, stabilizing, or decreasing?
- Is someone attempting to bypass an established boundary or procedure?
- Does someone appear to need assistance?
- Is anyone vulnerable or potentially at risk?
- Can I safely clarify the situation, or does what I already know require action?
- What responsibility belongs to me?
- Who else needs to know?

Discernment is not determining someone's intentions. It is determining what the observable situation requires from you.

You do not need to resolve every uncertainty yourself. Do not delay an appropriate response when the circumstances already require action.

ACT

Choose the response that fits the situation.

Acting does not necessarily mean confronting or intervening.

CONTINUE OBSERVING	Remain aware when something deserves attention but no additional action is currently required.
ENGAGE APPROPRIATELY	When appropriate and safe within your role, greet the person, offer assistance, ask an appropriate question, provide directions, or explain an established procedure. You are not required to approach someone when the situation appears unsafe or getting assistance is the better response.
NOTIFY OR REPORT	Communicate useful information to the appropriate ministry leader, supervisor, or safety/security person.
GET THE APPROPRIATE PERSON INVOLVED	Get assistance when the situation exceeds your responsibility, authority, training, or ability to respond appropriately.
FOLLOW EMERGENCY PROCEDURES	When there is an apparent immediate threat to life or safety, the priority shifts from gathering information to emergency response. Follow your organization's emergency procedures and contact emergency services as appropriate.

These are response options - not steps that must be completed in order.

WHEN THE RESPONSE CHANGES

TENSION OR CONFLICT	L.O.V.E. De-Escalation may guide the appropriate response when used within your role and training.
IMMEDIATE THREAT	Follow established emergency procedures and PROTECT Active Threat Response principles according to your role and training.

The response should fit the situation.

REASSESS

What changed?

After acting, look again.

- Did the behavior stop, continue, or escalate?
- Did the situation improve or become more concerning?
- Did new information change my understanding?
- Has the level of concern increased or decreased?
- Does someone else now need to be involved?
- Does my response need to change?

Reassessment may also determine that the concern has been resolved and no further action is needed.

New information may require a new response.

OBSERVE	DISCERN	ACT	REASSESS
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**PAGE 3 - COMMUNICATE,
ESCALATE & APPLY**

REPORT EARLY. REPORT CLEARLY.

When a legitimate concern needs to be communicated, do so without unnecessary delay and give the other person information they can use.

WHAT What did you actually observe?	WHERE Where is it happening?
WHO Who or what is involved? Provide useful descriptive information when necessary.	WHAT CHANGED What behavior, circumstance, or development caused concern?
WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW What is the current status?	WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE If applicable, explain what action has already been taken.

Reporting early does not mean reporting every unusual circumstance. It means communicating a legitimate concern before unnecessary delay.

KEEP THE REPORT USEFUL

DO	AVOID
- Describe observable behavior. - Be specific and concise. - Communicate meaningful changes. - State what is happening now. - Correct information when circumstances change.	- Guessing someone's intentions. - Exaggerating or minimizing what happened. - Replacing behavioral descriptions with labels. - Passing along assumptions or rumors as facts.

Report what you know. Clearly identify what you do not know.

WHEN SHOULD I GET ADDITIONAL HELP?

CONTINUE / MONITOR	The circumstances deserve awareness, but there is no immediate safety concern and no additional action is currently required.
GET ASSISTANCE	Bring in the appropriate person when: the situation exceeds your assigned responsibility; access or boundary concerns continue; behavior is escalating; a conflict is not resolving appropriately; someone needs assistance beyond what you can provide; or you are uncertain how to proceed and assistance would help resolve the situation safely. Depending on the circumstances, assistance may come from a ministry leader, supervisor, children's/youth leader, medical responder, or safety/security personnel.
EMERGENCY RESPONSE	When there is an apparent immediate threat to life or safety, the priority shifts from gathering information to emergency response. Follow your organization's emergency procedures and contact emergency services as appropriate.

KNOW YOUR ROLE

Awareness does not create authority. Your responsibility may simply be to: Observe. Assist. Communicate. Notify. Follow procedure. Get help.

Do not assume responsibilities outside your role, authority, organizational policy, or training. Situational awareness does not require you to investigate someone's intentions, unnecessarily confront or pursue someone, or independently resolve every situation you observe. Sometimes the wisest action is getting the right person involved.

FIELD APPLICATION

SITUATION: An unfamiliar adult is standing near the children's check-in area. Being unfamiliar alone is not a safety concern. The individual then attempts to enter through a controlled children's entrance without following the ministry's check-in procedure.

OBSERVE	An adult attempted to enter a controlled children's area without following the established access procedure. That is what you know. You do not yet know why.
DISCERN	The concern is not that the person is unfamiliar. The concern is the attempt to bypass an established access procedure protecting children.
ACT	Follow the ministry's established access procedure. When appropriate within your role, provide instructions or assistance and get the appropriate children's ministry leader or safety/security person involved when needed.
REASSESS	Does the person follow the procedure or provide information that reasonably resolves the concern? Does the behavior continue or escalate? If the situation is resolved, return to normal ministry activity. If it becomes more concerning, adjust the response and get additional help.

FIELD REMINDER

OBSERVE What is actually happening?	DISCERN What does this situation require?	ACT What is the appropriate response within my role?	REASSESS What has changed?
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A concern is not necessarily a threat. Awareness does not create authority. Uncertainty does not always require more investigation.

Focus on behavior. Consider context. Respond proportionately. Communicate clearly. Know when to get help.

Follow your organization's policies, assigned responsibilities, training, and emergency procedures.

