

SECURITY • BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE • MINISTRY

# Microexpressions AT THE CHURCH DOOR



## Microexpressions at the Church Door

A Practical Guide to Observation, Safety, and Compassion

A Practical Guide to Observation, Safety, and Compassion

BY A SECURITY & BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS EXPERT

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*A Practical Guide to Observation, Safety, and Compassion*

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Published in the United States of America

First Edition, 2024

**Disclaimer:** The information in this book is intended for educational and training purposes for authorized church security personnel. Nothing in this book constitutes legal advice. Readers should consult qualified legal counsel and law enforcement professionals regarding security protocols specific to their jurisdiction and congregation.

References to Paul Ekman's research are made for educational purposes. FACS (Facial Action Coding System), METT (Micro Expression Training Tool), and related trademarks are property of their respective owners.

ISBN: 978-X-XXXXXX-XXX-X (Print)

ISBN: 978-X-XXXXXX-XXX-X (Digital)

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*To those who stand at the door —  
may you see clearly, act wisely,  
and serve with compassion.*

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INTRODUCTION

# The Sacred Threshold

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*"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light."*

— Matthew 6:22

## The Door as a Threshold

There is no more charged space in any house of worship than its entrance. The door of a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple is simultaneously an architectural feature and a theological statement: this is where the outside world ends and something different begins. It is the place where the sacred and the profane meet, where the hurting and the hostile may arrive side by side, and where the person responsible for greeting both must, in the span of a few heartbeats, make accurate assessments about intent, need, and safety.

For most of Christian history, the church door was attended by deacons and elders whose duty was hospitality first, discernment second. They welcomed the stranger, assisted the poor, and guided the newcomer. The idea that this same doorway might require a security posture would have been unthinkable to earlier generations. Today, it is an urgent necessity.

The statistics are sobering. Since 2012, attacks on houses of worship in the United States have increased by more than 800 percent. The FBI's annual reports on hate crimes consistently show religious institutions among the top five target categories. High-profile tragedies — Charleston, Sutherland Springs, Pittsburgh, Christchurch — have demonstrated that the sanctuary is not immune from the most severe forms of human violence. And yet these same events have underscored a truth that is easy to miss in the headlines: in the majority of cases, there were observable signals in the minutes, hours, or even days before an attack. Someone saw something. Someone felt something was wrong. The tragedy, often, was not a failure of intelligence — it was a failure of structured observation and confident action.

This book is about closing that gap.

## **Why Behavioral Observation Matters Here**

Traditional security approaches — cameras, metal detectors, armed guards — are reactive. They respond to a threat that has already materialized. Behavioral observation is predictive. It reads the signals that precede action: the anxiety that leaks through a forced smile, the contempt that flashes across a face before a carefully rehearsed greeting, the hands that won't stop moving, the eyes that check exits rather than faces.

The science of microexpressions, developed over six decades of cross-cultural research beginning with the foundational work of Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen, offers a remarkable insight: the human face tells the truth even when the mouth does not. The involuntary muscular contractions that accompany genuine emotion

cannot be fully suppressed. They last between one-twenty-fifth and one-fifth of a second — too brief for conscious awareness under normal circumstances, but entirely detectable by a trained observer who knows what to look for.

Pair this with what researchers call "behavioral baseline analysis" — the ability to recognize when someone's behavior deviates meaningfully from what is normal for that person, that context, and that moment — and you have a security methodology that is both more humane and more effective than a metal detector. Metal detectors catch weapons. Behavioral observation catches intent.

*"Security begins not when a weapon is drawn, but when a human being decides to do harm. Our task is to read the space between that decision and its execution."*

CORE PRINCIPLE OF BEHAVIORAL SECURITY

## **The Tension Between Hospitality and Vigilance**

Before we go further, we must name the central tension that every church security team member faces: you are simultaneously a servant and a sentinel. The theology of welcome — "do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2) — is not a platitude you can set aside when it becomes inconvenient. It is a moral imperative that shapes everything you do at that door.

The person who approaches looking frightened may be a trafficking survivor who has finally found the courage to seek help. They may be an anxious first-time visitor who has never been in a church before. Or, in rare but real scenarios, they may be concealing a threat beneath that fear. Your job is to hold all three possibilities simultaneously and respond to the one that is actually true — not the one you assume based on how they look, where they're from, or what they're wearing.

This is precisely why behavioral science is so valuable in this context. A purely security-focused approach too easily slides into profiling — which is both morally wrong and operationally ineffective, because it directs attention toward demographic categories rather than behavioral signals. Behavioral analysis, properly applied, is exquisitely context-sensitive and individualized. It asks not "what kind of person is this?" but "what is this person's behavior telling me right now, in this moment, compared to what I would expect to see?"

Held rightly, hospitality and vigilance are not opposites. They are disciplines that reinforce each other. A welcoming smile from a trained observer communicates warmth while simultaneously gathering critical data. A gentle, unhurried question — "Good morning! Is this your first time with us?" — is both genuine pastoral care and skilled elicitation. This integration of warmth and watchfulness is what the best security volunteers and professionals learn to embody, and it is what this book will help you cultivate.

## How This Book Is Structured

This book is organized to build understanding progressively, from the foundational science to its applied practice in the specific environment of a house of worship.

Chapters One through Three lay the scientific groundwork: what microexpressions are and how they work (Chapter One), how to establish behavioral baselines for your specific congregation (Chapter Two), and how to read behavior at a distance before a person ever reaches the door (Chapter Three). These chapters are the foundation. Do not skip them, even if you feel you already have security experience. The vocabulary and frameworks introduced here underpin everything that follows.

Chapters Four through Seven move to applied technique: the critical moment of contact at the door (Chapter Four), a detailed guide to all seven universal emotions and their facial signatures (Chapter Five), body language signals below the face (Chapter Six), and the vital principle of reading behavioral clusters rather than isolated cues (Chapter Seven).

Chapters Eight through Ten address real-world complexity: special populations and situations that require adapted approaches (Chapter Eight), team communication and protocol design (Chapter Nine), and the theological and psychological foundation of compassion-centered security (Chapter Ten).

The book closes with an Afterword on continuing education, a comprehensive Glossary of key terms, and a curated list of Further Reading and professional resources.

## **A Note on the Author's Philosophy**

I have spent two decades at the intersection of behavioral science, threat assessment, and ministry. I have trained law enforcement officers and Sunday school teachers alike. I have stood at the door of a congregation on Easter morning, watching five hundred people arrive in the space of forty-five minutes, making rapid assessments about dozens of unknown visitors. And I have sat with the family of a church volunteer who did not see the signs in time.

What I have come to believe, with deep conviction, is this: the safest communities are also the most loving communities. Fear makes us stupid. It narrows attention, triggers confirmation bias, and turns every unfamiliar face into a threat. But a grounded, trained, compassionate observer — someone who has done the disciplined work of learning what human emotion actually looks like, and who approaches every person with genuine regard for their dignity — is both a more effective security professional and a more faithful disciple.

This book is not a substitute for professional security training, law enforcement partnership, or sound congregational safety policies. It is a companion to all of those things. Read it actively. Do the exercises. Practice the observations. And always, always let love be the operating system beneath the skill.

### BEFORE YOU READ FURTHER: A BASELINE EXERCISE

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Before turning to Chapter One, spend five minutes doing the following:

1. Find a public place where you can observe people arriving and departing — a coffee shop entrance, a store doorway, your church's main entry before or after a service.
2. For each person who enters, note (in your mind or on paper): *What is their pace? Where are their hands? Where are their eyes? What is their body doing that I would not have predicted?*
3. Write one sentence about each person you observe: what you noticed, what you thought it meant, and whether you would have found them memorable had you not been looking carefully.

Most people, having done this exercise, are startled by how much information the human body is constantly broadcasting — and how much they were previously ignoring. That gap between what people reveal and what observers typically catch is exactly where this book lives.

CHAPTER ONE

# 1

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## The Science of Microexpressions

*"The face is a picture of the mind with the eyes as its interpreter."*

— Marcus Tullius Cicero

### A Revolution in Understanding Emotion

In the late 1960s, a young psychologist named Paul Ekman traveled to a remote highland region of Papua New Guinea to meet the Fore people, a tribe that had lived in near-complete isolation from the modern world. His purpose was to test a hypothesis that most of his colleagues found improbable: that certain facial expressions of emotion are universal — not learned culturally, but biologically inscribed in the human organism from birth.

When Ekman showed the Fore photographs of Western faces expressing happiness, sadness, fear, anger, contempt, disgust, and surprise, they identified the emotions accurately and at rates matching those of Western study participants. When he photographed the Fore themselves expressing these emotions, Western observers identified them just as readily. The conclusion

was revolutionary. Across cultures separated by thousands of years of independent development, the same muscle movements expressed the same emotional states. Human emotional expression, at least at this level, is as universal as the human genome.

This discovery — published in collaboration with Wallace Friesen and subsequently validated in dozens of cross-cultural studies over five decades — laid the groundwork for the science of microexpression analysis that we will study in this book. Understanding its origins matters because it anchors the methodology in rigorous empirical science, not folk psychology or intuition. What you will learn to see is real. It has been measured, tested, replicated, and refined. And with proper training, it can be learned.

## What Is a Microexpression?

A microexpression is an involuntary facial movement that reveals an emotional state a person is attempting to conceal or suppress. It is not the same as an expression that happens to be brief. The defining characteristics of a genuine microexpression are three:

1. **Duration:** It lasts between 1/25th and 1/5th of a second (40–200 milliseconds). At full speed, it is invisible to the untrained eye. Trained observers can catch microexpressions in real time after sufficient practice, though many practitioners are more accurate when reviewing slowed video.

2. **Involuntary origin:** Microexpressions are produced by the subcortical emotional system — particularly the amygdala — before conscious suppression mechanisms can engage. The person experiencing them typically does not know they have occurred. This is what makes them so valuable: they are honest even when the person is attempting to deceive.
3. **Completeness:** A microexpression, however brief, involves the same full facial muscle configurations as a macro (full-duration) expression. It is not a partial or subtle expression; it is a complete one, simply compressed in time.

*"A microexpression is not a performance. It is a leak — the truth pressing through a mask too briefly for the masker to notice, but long enough for the trained eye to see."*

PAUL EKMAN'S FOUNDATIONAL INSIGHT

## The Seven Universal Emotions

Ekman's research identified seven emotional states whose facial expressions are universal across cultures. Every human being, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, language, or religion, produces these expressions under the conditions of genuine emotional arousal:

- **Happiness** — The experience of pleasure, contentment, or joy
- **Sadness** — The experience of loss, grief, or despondency

- **Fear** — The experience of threat, danger, or alarm
- **Anger** — The experience of frustration, injustice, or hostility
- **Contempt** — The experience of superiority and disdain toward another
- **Disgust** — The experience of revulsion at something offensive to taste, sight, or morality
- **Surprise** — The experience of encountering the unexpected

Each emotion has a specific and identifiable facial signature — a combination of muscle movements (described in the Facial Action Coding System, or FACS, which Ekman and Friesen developed to catalog every possible facial muscle movement with anatomical precision). We will examine each of these in detail in Chapter Five. For now, understand that these seven emotions are the vocabulary of the face, and like any vocabulary, they must be studied and practiced to be fluently read.

Subsequent research has debated whether the list should be expanded to include emotions like embarrassment, awe, pride, and others — and the scientific conversation continues. For practical security observation purposes, the original seven remain the most reliable and operationally significant. They are the emotions most likely to appear as microexpressions under conditions of stress, concealment, or threatening intent.

## **Macroexpressions, Microexpressions, and Subtle Expressions**

One of the most important distinctions for the working observer is the spectrum of expression duration and completeness:

### **MACROEXPRESSIONS**

These are full-duration facial expressions lasting from half a second to four or more seconds. They are the expressions we recognize and interpret in ordinary social interaction: the smile that spreads across a face when friends meet, the look of frustration that crosses someone's features during an argument, the fear that appears when someone narrowly avoids an accident. Most of us are reasonably good at reading macroexpressions. They are the stock-in-trade of basic human social communication.

### **MICROEXPRESSIONS**

As described above, these last 40–200 milliseconds and occur when suppression mechanisms are engaged but imperfect. They are most likely to occur when a person is actively trying to control their emotional display while the underlying emotion is strong. They are the primary focus of professional behavioral analysis training.

### **SUBTLE EXPRESSIONS**

These are low-intensity expressions in which not all the muscles involved in a given emotion are fully activated. They occur when an emotion is felt at mild intensity or when suppression is very effective, resulting in a partial or dampened version of the full

expression. They last normal durations but are difficult to read because the signal is weak. Training helps observers recognize even these attenuated signals.

In the church door context, you are most likely to encounter macroexpressions from distressed or grieving visitors, microexpressions from individuals concealing hostile or fearful states, and subtle expressions from those who are managing moderate anxiety about attending church, about approaching a security figure, or about some private emotional situation that has nothing to do with security at all.

## **The Neurological Basis: Amygdala and the Autonomic System**

To understand why microexpressions are involuntary, we need a brief tour of the relevant neuroscience. The amygdala — a pair of almond-shaped structures deep in the medial temporal lobe of the brain — functions as the brain's primary threat-detection and emotional-response system. It processes incoming sensory data for emotional significance before that data reaches the cortex for conscious evaluation. This is the neurological substrate of gut feelings: the amygdala has already assessed a situation as threatening and initiated physiological responses before you have consciously decided how to feel about it.

When the amygdala detects a significant emotional signal — threat, grief, disgust, joy — it triggers both physiological changes (heart rate, respiration, muscle tension) and facial muscle movements through the subcortical motor system. This is the involuntary pathway. Separately, the cortex (particularly the

prefrontal cortex) controls the voluntary facial expressions we use in social communication: the polite smile, the "I'm fine" neutral face, the deliberately composed expression of a person trying to appear calm.

Microexpressions occur at the boundary between these two systems. A strong emotional signal fires the subcortical system; the cortex attempts to suppress or override it. The microexpression is the window of time, however brief, when the subcortical signal gets through before the cortical override completes. Understanding this biology has a practical implication: the stronger the underlying emotion, the more likely a microexpression is to occur. And a person attempting to conceal a very strong emotion — rage, terror, desperate grief — will produce more microexpressions, not fewer, precisely because the emotional pressure is too great for perfect suppression.

*"The amygdala does not lie. It does not have a social face or a polite face. It responds to what is real with what is true. The microexpression is its signature."*

FROM BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE LITERATURE

## Common Misconceptions

Several misconceptions about microexpressions are prevalent enough to warrant direct address before we proceed further.

## **MISCONCEPTION 1: MICROEXPRESSIONS DETECT LIES**

This is the most common and the most dangerous misconception, partly because it has been amplified by popular television programs. Microexpressions detect *emotions*. They do not detect deception. A person who is telling the truth but is afraid of not being believed will show fear. A person who is lying without a shred of guilt will show nothing that distinguishes them from an honest person. Emotional leakage and deception are correlated but not equivalent. Use microexpressions to identify emotional states; use other behavioral clusters (covered in Chapter Seven) to assess congruence between stated information and behavioral signals.

## **MISCONCEPTION 2: ONLY SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE SHOW MICROEXPRESSIONS**

Everyone shows microexpressions. The grieving mother at her son's memorial service will show flashes of contempt when someone says something callous. The excited first-time visitor will show micro-flashes of fear as they work up the courage to go inside. Microexpressions are the background noise of human emotional life. The security observer's task is not to notice that a microexpression occurred, but to accurately identify which emotion it represents and then assess its significance in context.

### **MISCONCEPTION 3: MICROEXPRESSION READING IS INFALLIBLE**

No behavioral observation technique is infallible. Even the best-trained practitioners misread subtle expressions and miss rapid microexpressions. The methodology reduces error; it does not eliminate it. This is why Chapter Seven's discussion of behavioral clusters is so important: multiple congruent signals provide far greater confidence than any single cue, however dramatic.

### **MISCONCEPTION 4: YOU EITHER HAVE THE GIFT OR YOU DON'T**

Research by Ekman and colleagues, as well as subsequent investigators, has consistently shown that microexpression detection is a trainable skill. Baseline accuracy among untrained adults is approximately 40–50%. After structured training using tools like the Micro Expression Training Tool (METT), participants routinely achieve accuracy rates of 60–80% and above. The "gift" is not seeing microexpressions; it is having the discipline to train until seeing them becomes natural.

## **How Training Changes Your Ability to Detect Them**

The primary challenge of microexpression detection is not perceptual — your eyes are capable of registering the information. It is attentional. Ordinary social interaction does not require you to attend closely to rapid facial changes; in fact, staring intently at someone's face during conversation is socially uncomfortable and

counterproductive. Most people therefore develop a habit of peripheral facial attention. Microexpression training recalibrates this default.

Effective training programs present photographs or video clips of facial expressions at progressively shorter durations, beginning at recognizable speeds and gradually decreasing to microexpression speed. The learner must identify the emotion as quickly and accurately as possible, receiving immediate feedback after each response. This feedback loop is essential: it prevents the learning of incorrect associations and reinforces accurate pattern recognition.

After training, many practitioners report a qualitative shift in how they experience social interactions: they notice more, process facial information faster, and make more accurate emotional assessments. Some find this uncomfortable initially — noticing emotions that people would prefer to keep private can feel intrusive — until they integrate the awareness with the compassionate response framework we will discuss in Chapter Ten.

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### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: FLASH-CARD TRAINING FOR YOUR EYES**

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The following exercises can be done without commercial software and will meaningfully improve your microexpression detection speed over two to four weeks of daily practice:

1. **The Emotion Flash:** Using a photo-editing app or website, find photographs of genuine emotional expressions (search for "Ekman facial expression photos" or use the METT training tool). Flash each image for 200 milliseconds (roughly one-fifth of a second) by quickly swiping or covering it. Write down the emotion before checking. Aim for 20 trials per session.
2. **The News Mute:** Watch a news broadcast or interview with the sound off. For each person on screen, write continuous notes about what emotions you observe. Then watch the same segment with sound and compare your observations to what the person is saying. Note congruences and incongruences.
3. **The Family Dinner Test:** At your next family meal or social gathering, observe one person at a time for two to three minutes, attending specifically to brief facial changes around the eyes and mouth. Do not stare; practice using your peripheral attention while maintaining normal eye contact. Note what you catch.

4. **The Commercial Catalog:** Advertising photography deliberately uses powerful emotional expressions. Browse magazine or online advertising images, attempting to identify the exact emotion being portrayed and the specific facial muscles involved. This builds pattern vocabulary without time pressure.
5. **Progressive Speed Reduction:** Show yourself an expression photo at full view, memorize it, then practice "seeing" it in increasingly brief mental flashes. This mental simulation activates the same neural pathways as actual perception training.

Commit to at least 15 minutes of daily practice for 30 days before evaluating your progress. Keep a log. The science on skill acquisition is unambiguous: distributed practice over time produces far superior results to concentrated cramming.

CHAPTER TWO

# 2

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## **Baseline Behavior — Know Your "Normal"**

*"Before you can recognize the unusual, you must intimately  
know the usual."*

— Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear*

### **The Foundation of All Observation**

Imagine a physician who attempts to diagnose illness without any knowledge of healthy physiology. Every reading — elevated heart rate, unusual skin color, unexpected muscle tension — would be meaningless without a baseline of normal against which to compare it. Security observation works exactly the same way. Before you can identify behavior that signals threat or distress, you must deeply understand what normal looks like in your specific environment, for your specific population, at your specific time.

This is the concept of behavioral baseline: the established range of behaviors that are typical, expected, and contextually appropriate for a given setting and group. Deviations from baseline — not

demographic characteristics, not clothing choices, not subjective suspicions — are the primary raw material of behavioral security assessment.

The challenge, and the discipline, lies in building a baseline that is accurate enough to be useful without being so rigid that it generates false positives every time someone behaves in a slightly unusual way. A good baseline is flexible, context-sensitive, culturally aware, and constantly updated. It is a living mental model, not a fixed list of rules.

## **Establishing Baseline for Your Specific Congregation**

Your congregation is not the same as another congregation across town, and it is not the same as the hypothetical congregation described in textbooks. It has its own culture, its own emotional register, its own patterns of arrival and departure, its own rhythm of interaction. The first job of any church security team is to know their congregation as thoroughly as a family doctor knows their patient panel.

How do you build this knowledge systematically? Begin with observation without agenda. Before your next several services, spend time at the entry point not as a greeter looking for problems, but as a passive observer cataloging normalcy. Notice:

- At what pace do most people arrive? Is there a rush before the service begins, or do people trickle in gradually?
- What is the typical emotional register at the door? Cheerful and social? Quiet and inward? Hurried?

- How do regular members interact with greeters? With each other?
- Where do people look when they arrive? Do they scan the space or move directly to familiar seats?
- What is the typical body language of someone entering your church? Open, closed, purposeful, tentative?
- What are the characteristic arrival groups — families, couples, singles, seniors, young adults?

After several observation sessions, you will have a remarkably clear mental picture of what "normal arrival" looks like for your community. This picture is your baseline. Everything you observe on a given Sunday will be measured against it.

*"You cannot spot the wolf unless you know the flock. Knowing your congregation — their names, their habits, their stories — is not a social nicety. It is a security imperative."*

CHURCH SECURITY TRAINING DOCTRINE

## **Cultural, Generational, and Individual Variation**

One of the most important and most frequently violated principles in behavioral observation is this: baseline is individual, not universal. What appears on a chart as "normal body language" may be quite different from what is normal for the elderly Korean grandmother who arrives every Sunday with her family, or the

teenager who has been dragged to church against his will, or the first-generation immigrant from a culture where avoiding eye contact with authority figures is a sign of respect rather than guilt.

## CULTURAL VARIATION

Baseline expressions and behaviors vary significantly across cultures, though microexpressions of the seven universal emotions do not. What varies is the *display rules* — the culturally learned norms about which emotions are appropriate to express, in what intensity, and in what contexts. In cultures with strong emotional suppression norms (certain East Asian, Northern European, or traditional religious cultures), baseline emotional expression is more controlled. An observer unfamiliar with these norms may interpret ordinary cultural composure as suspicious concealment.

Similarly, personal space norms, eye contact patterns, greeting gestures, and conversational cadences all vary by cultural background. The person who stands unusually close, or who avoids eye contact, or who uses a double-cheek greeting kiss may simply be operating from a different cultural playbook — not from deceptive intent.

## GENERATIONAL VARIATION

Older visitors to your congregation may walk more slowly, make less eye contact (due to vision or social convention), carry more bags, and respond to greetings more formally. Teenagers may appear distracted, keep their heads down toward their phones, walk loosely, and make social expressions that look, to older observers,

like discomfort or attitude. Children may run, shout, cry, or behave in ways that seem alarming until you recognize them as developmentally normal.

## INDIVIDUAL VARIATION

Some individuals simply have unusual baselines. The person who always looks nervous may have an anxiety disorder. The person who never makes eye contact may have autism spectrum characteristics. The person who always arrives looking exhausted and disheveled may be a night-shift worker. The person who appears to be in a hurry and does not stop to chat may be an introvert for whom social small talk is genuinely effortful.

The most powerful tool for accounting for individual variation is the simplest one: know your regulars by name and story. When you know that Mr. Chen always looks a bit startled because he is hard of hearing, that Mrs. Williams moves slowly because of her knee replacement, and that the young man in the hoodie always avoids the greeters because he has social anxiety, you have built individual baselines. Anomalies from those individual baselines are far more meaningful than anomalies from a generic population average.

## Seasonal and Event-Based Behavioral Shifts

Congregational behavior is not static across the calendar year. Major church events and liturgical seasons reliably alter the behavioral landscape in ways that trained observers should anticipate:

## **CHRISTMAS AND EASTER**

These "high attendance" events bring large numbers of visitors who have no established individual baseline with your security team and who may themselves be experiencing heightened emotional states — nostalgia, family conflict, grief for absent loved ones, religious ambivalence, or genuine spiritual hunger. The behavioral environment is more complex, the percentage of known individuals lower, and the potential emotional volatility higher. Increase your observation resources at these events, not reduce them, even though the festive atmosphere may make heightened security feel counterintuitive.

## **FUNERALS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES**

Grief dramatically alters behavior in ways that can superficially resemble threat indicators: people may arrive looking dazed, disoriented, or expressionless (emotional shutdown following shock); some may be agitated or tearful (normal grief responses); and family dynamics under stress may produce occasional heated exchanges. Your primary frame for observing a funeral is grief, not threat — while remaining alert to the rare circumstance where a funeral becomes a site of genuine conflict between estranged family members or community factions.

## **SPECIAL SPEAKERS AND HIGH-PROFILE EVENTS**

When your congregation hosts a nationally known speaker, a political figure, or a celebrity pastor, the demographic and behavioral profile of your incoming crowd will shift significantly. People who do not know your church will arrive in larger numbers.

Media personnel may be present. Protest activity is more likely. The security posture at these events requires careful advance planning and a revised baseline assessment.

## **WEDDING DAYS**

Weddings bring together people from different social networks who may have no connection to the church or to each other. Family tensions, alcohol consumption at pre-event gatherings, and the emotional intensity of the occasion create a complex environment. Pay particular attention to anyone who appears to be conflicted about attending, or who makes a point of knowing exits or staff positions early in the event.

## **The Danger of Assumptions and Cognitive Biases**

Every human observer carries cognitive biases that silently shape their perceptions. In security observation, unchecked biases are not merely unfair — they are operationally dangerous, because they direct attention away from real threats and toward irrelevant demographic features. The most important biases to recognize in yourself are:

### **CONFIRMATION BIAS**

Once you have decided that a person seems suspicious, you will notice everything that confirms this assessment and discount everything that contradicts it. The antidote is to deliberately seek disconfirming evidence: what behaviors is this person showing that would be perfectly consistent with benign intent?

## **AVAILABILITY BIAS**

You overweight threats that are vivid in your memory (a recent news event, a previous incident at your church) and underweight threats that are less memorable. This can cause you to focus on the type of perpetrator who has attacked churches recently while missing a very different threat profile walking through your door.

## **IN-GROUP FAVORITISM**

We are neurologically predisposed to perceive members of our own social group as safer than members of other groups. In a church context, this can mean unconsciously assigning positive intent to people who look like longtime members and negative intent to people who do not — entirely on the basis of demographic resemblance rather than behavioral data. This bias kills people. It has killed people. Train against it relentlessly.

## **THE HALO AND HORN EFFECTS**

Attractive, well-dressed, socially skilled people receive the benefit of the doubt in ways that objectively less polished individuals do not, even when the behavioral data is identical. The perpetrators of several high-profile church attacks were described by witnesses as "nice-looking," "polite," or "normal." These are halo effects. Charisma is not a security clearance.

## Building a Mental Map of Your Regulars

Develop the habit of mentally cataloging your regular attendees in terms of their behavioral signature: their typical arrival time, their characteristic demeanor, their usual companions, their customary path through the building, and any known personal circumstances that affect their presentation. This does not require keeping records or surveillance — it is simply the same attentive pastoral knowledge that good deacons, greeters, and elders have always had.

The practical benefit is this: when a regular deviates significantly from their personal baseline, you will know it instantly, and you can respond with pastoral care rather than security escalation. The man who normally arrives smiling and greets everyone by name, who today enters alone, avoids eye contact, and sits in an unusual seat, may be in crisis. He may need a check-in, not a security response. Your familiarity with him makes that distinction possible.

*"The three-second assessment is only reliable if it rests on a three-year knowledge of the people and patterns you are assessing."*

BEHAVIORAL SECURITY INSTRUCTOR MAXIM

## **The Warm/Cool/Alert Mental Triage System**

When observing arriving individuals, a simple three-category mental triage system provides a workable framework for real-time assessment without the cognitive overload of trying to apply complex behavioral analysis in a busy, dynamic environment.

### **WARM**

This person's behavior is consistent with the positive end of your congregation's baseline. Open body posture, comfortable eye contact, responsive to greetings, unhurried. If you know them, their behavior matches their personal baseline. No further observation necessary beyond normal pastoral awareness. Most people who come to church fall into this category, and this is the correct default assumption.

### **COOL**

This person's behavior is slightly off your baseline — perhaps unusually quiet, avoiding greeters, arriving alone when they usually come with family, or wearing an expression that seems inconsistent with the context. Nothing alarming, but worthy of gentle pastoral attention. A "cool" designation might prompt you to personally greet the individual, ask how they're doing, and offer a moment of genuine human connection. Nine times in ten, a brief warm interaction resolves "cool" to "warm" as you discover a mundane explanation: they had a hard week, they're feeling under the weather, they're nervous about a first visit.

## **ALERT**

This person's behavior significantly deviates from baseline in ways that match behavioral indicators of threat, extreme distress, or dangerous mental states. Alert does not mean action — it means heightened observation, team communication, and readiness to escalate. The criteria for "alert" are discussed in the chapters ahead.



## PRACTICAL APPLICATION: BUILDING YOUR CONGREGATION'S BASELINE PROFILE

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1. **The Five-Week Observation Journal:** For five consecutive Sundays, spend the first 20 minutes of your door post writing observations about arriving people: pace, demeanor, direction of gaze, interaction patterns. At the end of five weeks, review your notes and write a one-page "behavioral profile" of your typical arriving congregant. This document becomes your baseline reference.
2. **The Known Face Inventory:** List 20 regular attendees and write three sentences about each person's characteristic arrival behavior. What does normal look like for them specifically? Review this list monthly and update as people's circumstances change.
3. **The Cultural Humility Audit:** Ask yourself honestly: what cultures, age groups, or social styles are represented in your congregation that you may be less familiar with? Seek conversations with community members who can help you understand behavioral norms different from your own.
4. **The Seasonal Review:** Three weeks before Christmas, Easter, and any major church event, gather your security team for a 30-minute brief: who might be coming that we don't normally see? What emotional dynamics might be elevated? What does our adjusted baseline look like for this event?

5. **The Warm/Cool/Alert Drill:** At your next post, practice mentally categorizing every arriving person as Warm, Cool, or Alert within three seconds of first seeing them. Do not act on the categorization — this is purely a perceptual training exercise. After the service, review your assessments: were you mostly assigning Warm (as you should be)? What triggered your Cool and Alert assessments? Were they based on behavioral data or assumptions?

CHAPTER THREE

# 3

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## The Approach

*"The time to prepare isn't when the storm arrives at the door.  
It's when you first see it forming on the horizon."*

— Adapted from threat assessment doctrine

### The Gift of Distance

One of the most underutilized advantages in security observation is distance. Most untrained security volunteers wait for a person to reach them — to arrive at the door, to begin interacting, before they begin assessing. This is a fundamental mistake. The approach phase — from the moment a person enters your field of view to the moment they reach the door — is rich with behavioral data. It is also the phase in which a trained observer has the most time, the most freedom of movement, and the least pressure to act. Use it.

Professional threat assessment practitioners use a conceptual model of three observation zones, keyed to the distance between the observer and the approaching individual. Each zone offers different behavioral information and requires different observer behaviors.

## The Three Assessment Zones

### ZONE ONE: 30 FEET AND BEYOND

At this distance, you are observing macro-behaviors: the overall pattern of movement, the direction of approach, the composition of the arriving group, the presence of unusual items, and the general emotional register. The specific behavioral signals to attend to at this distance include:

- **Trajectory and purpose:** Does the person's approach suggest clear intent and direction, or are they hesitating, circling, or approaching and retreating? A person with benign intent typically approaches in a relatively direct line once they have decided to enter. Unusual trajectory patterns — particularly repeated approach-and-withdrawal cycles — are worth noting.
- **Pace:** Normal arrival pace for your congregation establishes a baseline. Significantly faster or slower pace is a potential signal. Someone approaching very slowly while scanning the environment may be conducting reconnaissance. Someone approaching at a run in the absence of an obvious reason (they're late, it's raining) may indicate urgency that warrants understanding.

- **Vehicle behavior:** If your church has a parking area visible from the entry point, observe how vehicles park and how individuals exit them. Vehicles parked with the nose out (ready for rapid exit), vehicles that park and then do not disgorge passengers for an unusual period, individuals who remain in their vehicle watching the entrance before exiting — these are behaviors worth cataloging. Note vehicle descriptions and license plates if anything gives you pause.
- **Group dynamics:** A group whose members interact normally with each other (conversation, shared laughter, child management) is behaving in a way consistent with a social purpose for attending church. Individuals arriving in proximity who do not interact at all may be separately affiliated or may simply not know each other. Groups where one member is clearly more tense than the others warrant closer attention.

## ZONE TWO: 15 FEET

At this middle distance, the observer can begin to read more refined behavioral signals while the approaching individual is still unaware of being specifically observed. This zone is ideal for initial facial reading, though detailed microexpression analysis is difficult at this distance. Key signals:

- **Scanning behavior:** Normal individuals approaching a building look where they are going and at the people near the entrance — briefly, socially, without calculation. Individuals who systematically scan exits, camera positions, security personnel locations, or the layout of the space are engaging in reconnaissance behavior that goes beyond normal curiosity. The scan is typically more methodical, less social, and accompanied by a neutral or slightly tense facial expression.
- **Eye contact avoidance:** Most people approaching a church entry will make brief eye contact with the greeter and offer at least a minimal social acknowledgment — a nod, a slight smile, a brief glance of recognition. Deliberate, effortful avoidance of eye contact with security or greeting personnel is a deviation from this baseline worth noting. Do not confuse this with the natural shyness of a first-time visitor, which is typically accompanied by other signals of social nervousness (visible self-consciousness, tentative body language, looking at signage for guidance).
- **Hands:** At fifteen feet, you should be able to see both of an approaching person's hands. Note whether they are visible or concealed, whether they are empty or carrying items, and whether they are in a relaxed position or demonstrating tension (white knuckles, rigid fingers, tight grip on carried items). The observation of hands is not paranoia; it is sound tactical practice that every trained security professional performs automatically.

*"The hands tell you what the person plans to do. The face tells you what they feel about doing it. Learn to read both simultaneously."*

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING DOCTRINE

### ZONE THREE: FIVE FEET

This is the zone of contact — the point at which interaction begins and at which microexpression reading becomes possible and essential. We will address this zone in detail in Chapter Four. For now, understand that Zone Three observation should confirm or disconfirm assessments already begun in Zones One and Two. If someone has looked perfectly normal through Zones One and Two and suddenly shows significant tension at five feet, that shift is worth noting. If someone looked marginally unusual at thirty feet but resolves to completely normal behavior at five feet through a natural and relaxed interaction, that is reassuring data.

### Gait Analysis: What the Walk Reveals

Human gait — the pattern and quality of a person's walk — is a surprisingly rich source of behavioral information. We are neurologically wired to read gait as a signal of mood, intent, and physical state, even when we are not consciously attending to it. Trained observers simply make this natural capacity explicit and systematic.

## NORMAL GAIT CHARACTERISTICS FOR YOUR CONTEXT

Establish your baseline for the typical arriving congregant: their pace (unhurried, purposeful, slightly faster in inclement weather), their posture (generally upright, slightly relaxed), their arm swing (natural, symmetrical, moderate), and their foot fall (steady, directed). Most healthy adults walking with benign intent show a gait that is smooth, rhythmic, and purposeful without being hurried.

## SIGNIFICANT GAIT DEVIATIONS

- **Hesitation and stopping:** A person who pauses mid-approach, looks around, and then resumes may be gathering information or gathering nerve. The latter is far more common, but both warrant attention.
- **Stiff or rigid upper body:** Individuals carrying concealed items on their torso or under their arms will often modify their arm swing and upper body movement to prevent the item from shifting or becoming visible. This produces an unusually stiff torso movement relative to the legs. It is one of the classic pre-attack indicators taught in law enforcement training.
- **Heavily loaded gait:** A person carrying significant weight on one side, or who walks with one arm consistently pressed against their body, may be carrying something they do not want to reveal. Context matters: a person arriving with a large backpack is not inherently suspicious, but the combination of a large backpack and a rigid upper body and avoidant eye contact is a different matter entirely.

- **Target glancing:** Research on pre-attack behavior has identified a consistent pattern called "target glancing" — the repeated, compulsive checking of specific individuals or locations by someone who is planning to act. The look is brief, intense, and repetitive. It differs from normal environmental scanning in its specificity and its repetitive return to the same target.

## Reading the Hands

The hands are the most operationally significant part of the body for the security observer. They are the agent of action — the means by which threat is delivered. But they also carry significant behavioral information beyond the question of "what is this person holding?"

Hands that are open and relaxed at the sides suggest psychological openness and ease. Hands that are tucked into pockets or pressed against the body suggest some degree of self-concealment — which may be ordinary social modesty, cold weather, or something worth investigating. Hands that grip the edge of a jacket, press repeatedly against a pocket, or touch the same spot repeatedly may be indicating the location of something the person is carrying and is aware of in an anxious way.

Watch also for the "security check" — the brief, automatic touch that most people give to a weapon, wallet, or other significant item they are carrying when they feel anxious. An individual who repeatedly touches their waistband, hip, or the area under a jacket is performing a security check that your observation skills can detect.

## **Head and Eyes: Direction and Quality of Gaze**

Beyond the specific targets of gaze discussed in zone analysis, the quality of a person's gaze during approach reveals significant emotional and cognitive information. A person who approaches with their head up, eyes moving naturally between the door, the greeters, and the surrounding environment is behaving in a way consistent with normal social awareness. A person approaching with their head down and eyes averted is showing withdrawal behavior that may indicate shame, grief, severe anxiety, or (much more rarely) deliberate concealment.

The direction of sustained gaze — where the eyes return after brief scanning movements — is particularly informative. Normal individuals' gaze returns to the people at the door and to the path ahead. Individuals conducting threat-related reconnaissance return their gaze to specific security personnel, camera locations, or potential targets within the building. This is different from the curiosity gaze of a first-time visitor, which tends to be broader, more exploratory, and accompanied by an expression of interest rather than calculation.

## **Body Orientation and Posture**

Open body posture — chest forward, arms relaxed, shoulders back — generally accompanies comfort and positive social engagement. Closed posture — arms crossed, shoulders forward, body slightly turned away — accompanies discomfort, anxiety, or self-protection. In approach, open posture that progressively becomes

more closed as the person nears the door may indicate increasing anxiety about contact. This is common in nervous first-time visitors and is typically resolved through warm greeting. Posture that begins closed and becomes increasingly rigid as proximity increases warrants more careful attention.

## **Solo vs. Group Dynamics**

Research on targeted violence events has consistently noted that perpetrators tend to arrive alone. This does not make every person arriving alone a suspect — most solo arrivals are entirely ordinary individuals who simply came to church by themselves. But in combination with other behavioral signals, solo arrival in an unfamiliar demographic context is worth noting. Conversely, individuals arriving in groups but who appear emotionally or behaviorally disconnected from their group members — not interacting, not making the same movements, maintaining unusual distance — may not be with the group in the way their physical proximity implies.

## **Pre-Attack Indicators in Public Settings**

The research literature on pre-attack behavior identifies several indicators that, in combination, warrant immediate escalation of observation and potential intervention. None of these should trigger action in isolation; they are warning signals that elevate concern and prompt closer monitoring:

- Repeated surveillance visits without attendance (the person appears multiple times but does not enter)

- Unusual interest in security procedures, camera locations, or entry protocols
- Asking questions about service schedules, congregation size, or the identity of specific leaders
- Wearing weather-inappropriate clothing (heavy coat in warm weather that could conceal weapons)
- Arriving with unusually large or irregularly shaped packages with no contextual explanation
- Visible physical signs of extreme arousal: flushing, sweating, rapid breathing
- Behavioral incongruence — stated purpose does not match observed behavior

*"The body commits before the mind finalizes. The security observer's advantage lies in reading the body's premature commitment."*

BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLE

## **Scenario: The Person Who Stops, Looks Around, Then Approaches**

This scenario is worth examining in detail because it is one of the most common and ambiguous situations you will encounter. A person approaches your entry, stops at a distance of roughly 20 feet, scans the area, and then walks forward and enters. What does this mean?

In the vast majority of cases, it means that a first-time visitor has paused to get their bearings — to confirm that they're at the right door, to look for signage about where to go, to overcome a moment of social nervousness before committing to entering. This is completely normal visitor behavior and should be responded to with warm outreach: a smile, a wave, or a brief walk toward them to offer guidance.

In a small minority of cases, the pause-and-scan is surveillance behavior — the person is assessing the entry point, identifying greeters, noting exits and security presence, or managing the psychological transition to intended action. The difference lies in the quality and targets of the scan (social and exploratory vs. methodical and tactical), the accompanying body language and facial expression, and what happens after the scan concludes. The person who enters and immediately relaxes into normal social interaction has almost certainly resolved their nervousness. The person who enters and continues the same scanning pattern inside has not.



## PRACTICAL APPLICATION: THE THREE-ZONE OBSERVATION DRILL

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1. **Zone Mapping:** Before your next service, physically stand at your post and identify the three zones: mark or note the approximate 30-foot, 15-foot, and 5-foot perimeters from your position. Knowing where these zones begin and end in your actual physical space sharpens your observation transitions.
2. **The Gait Journal:** During a busy arrival period, focus exclusively on gait for 10 minutes: pace, rhythm, upper body movement, arm swing. Write one word for each person who passes: smooth, stiff, hurried, cautious, relaxed. Do not try to make security assessments — just build your vocabulary for gait description.
3. **Hands First:** Practice making the first thing you look at when someone enters Zone One always be their hands. Where are they? What's in them? Are they visible? Make this a reflex through deliberate repetition over several sessions.
4. **The Pause Tracker:** For one service, note every person who pauses during their approach. Write down: how long they paused, what they appeared to look at, what they did after pausing, and how they behaved once inside. This builds your database of benign pause behavior, against which genuine surveillance pauses can be distinguished.

**5. Parking Lot Observation (if applicable):** Fifteen minutes before service, stand where you can observe the parking area. Note the vehicles, the pace at which people exit, whether any vehicle sits with engine running unusually long, and whether anyone seems to be delaying entry without an obvious reason.

CHAPTER FOUR

# 4

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## At the Door — The Critical Moment of Contact

*"In the space between hello and goodbye, everything important happens."*

— Behavioral interview specialist

### The Greeting as Intelligence-Gathering

The moment of contact at the church door is, from a behavioral analysis perspective, one of the most information-rich moments in the entire security encounter. The person has arrived at their destination. Their behavioral management is at its most tested — they must now engage in direct social interaction with a person who represents the threshold they are trying to cross. For someone concealing hostile intent, this moment is one of maximum cognitive load. For someone in genuine distress, it is a moment of potential revelation. For the vast majority of ordinary visitors, it is simply a warm social exchange — and your baseline knowledge should allow you to recognize that clearly.

The trained greeter/observer uses the greeting interaction as a structured opportunity for behavioral assessment. The components of the exchange — the initial visual contact, the handshake or other greeting gesture, the brief verbal exchange, the facial expressions and voice quality of both parties — each provide independent data streams that a trained observer synthesizes in real time.

This does not mean treating every visitor as a suspect. The posture of the trained observer is one of open warmth with alert attention — like a skilled emergency room nurse who greets every incoming patient with genuine care while simultaneously performing a rapid visual assessment. The care is real. The assessment is happening. Neither compromises the other.

## **Proxemics: Personal Space and What Violations Reveal**

Proxemics, the study of personal space in human interaction, was pioneered by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in the 1960s. Hall identified four primary distance zones that regulate social interaction in most Western cultures:

- **Intimate distance (0–18 inches):** Reserved for close personal relationships. Most people feel uncomfortable when strangers enter this zone without invitation.
- **Personal distance (18 inches–4 feet):** The zone of comfortable interaction with friends and acquaintances. Greeting-level interaction typically occurs in this range.

- **Social distance (4–12 feet):** Formal social and professional interactions. Initial greeting at a church entry might begin at the far end of this range.
- **Public distance (12+ feet):** Formal public speaking and presentations.

What does a proxemics violation reveal at the church door? A person who crowds uncomfortably close during greeting may be engaging in dominance behavior (deliberate invasion of your space to establish psychological advantage), may be impaired by substances or mental health conditions that affect social judgment, or may simply be from a culture with different personal space norms. A person who maintains unusual distance and resists normal greeting interaction may be avoiding any chance of physical detection, may be experiencing extreme social anxiety, or may be managing a physical or emotional state they do not want discovered.

The baseline proxemics of your congregation's typical greeting interaction provides the reference point. Significant deviations in either direction warrant a mental note, not an assumption, until other cues either confirm or resolve the question.

*"The greeting is a negotiation. Watch how each party manages distance, touch, and eye contact — these are the body's most honest negotiating moves."*

BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS TRAINING MATERIAL

## **The Handshake: Grip, Duration, Eye Contact, Palm Orientation**

Handshakes have been studied extensively as vectors of social signaling, and in the church entry context, they remain one of the most valuable brief behavioral assessment opportunities available. If your church's culture includes greeting handshakes, pay attention to these specific elements:

### **GRIP STRENGTH AND QUALITY**

A normal handshake involves moderate, matched pressure applied briefly and then released. A very limp handshake may indicate a person who is submissive, depressed, or physically ill. A very firm handshake may indicate someone asserting dominance, someone who is socially anxious and over-compensating, or simply someone who has always shaken hands this way. Neither extreme is inherently suspicious; both are worth noting as data points to be interpreted in the context of other signals.

### **DURATION**

Brief, one-pump handshakes followed by clean separation are standard in most contexts. A person who holds on significantly longer than the other party signals (consciously or not) either unusual warmth and desire for connection, or difficulty letting go in a way that may suggest an emotional state that seeks support. Unusual brevity — a barely-there touch and immediate withdrawal — suggests a desire to minimize contact that may be phobic, cultural, or deliberate.

## EYE CONTACT DURING THE HANDSHAKE

In most Western greeting contexts, eye contact is maintained during a handshake. Eyes that immediately dart away from contact during the handshake suggest either extreme social anxiety or a deliberate avoidance of the direct assessment opportunity that mutual eye contact provides.

## PALM ORIENTATION

The palm-down handshake (dominant position, hand offered with palm facing downward) is a power assertion gesture common in certain professional and dominance-signaling contexts. The palm-up offering (submissive position) may accompany deference, depression, or cultural signaling. Most ordinary greetings use a vertical palm (neutral). Significant deviation from the neutral grip orientation warrants mental notation alongside other behavioral data.

## Facial Scanning at the Point of Contact

Zone Three — five feet and under — is the only range at which reliable microexpression observation is possible with the naked eye. At this distance, the observer's task is to attend to the face while simultaneously maintaining normal social eye contact and warm conversational engagement. This dual-processing — which sounds impossible and feels awkward at first — becomes natural with training and practice.

The specific facial regions most reliably associated with emotional leakage are:

- **The forehead and brow area:** Fear and sadness raise the inner corners of the brows. Anger pulls the brows down and together. Surprise raises both brows fully and horizontally.
- **The area around the eyes (periorbital region):** Genuine happiness activates the orbicularis oculi muscle around the eyes (producing the characteristic crow's feet and lid compression of a true smile). This muscle is notoriously resistant to voluntary control — it is the reason fake smiles are detectable.
- **The nose and upper lip:** Disgust produces the characteristic nasal wrinkle and upper lip raise. Contempt produces an asymmetrical lip corner raise (on one side only).
- **The lip corners and jaw:** Fear pulls the lip corners back and slightly down. Anger compresses the lips. Surprise drops the jaw. Sadness pulls the lip corners down bilaterally.

The micro-flash — the brief, involuntary expression that crosses the face before social composure is reasserted — most often occurs at the transition points of the interaction: the first moment of eye contact, the moment the person begins to speak, and the moment your question lands (before they have formulated their response). These are the windows of maximum emotional leakage, and skilled observers learn to give these moments heightened attention.

## Voice and Paralanguage

Paralanguage — the non-verbal elements of speech: pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm, pausing, and disfluency — provides a parallel channel of behavioral information to the facial and body signals

already discussed. In the church door greeting, the following paralinguistic signals are most operationally relevant:

### **PITCH CHANGE**

The human voice rises in pitch under conditions of anxiety, excitement, or stress, due to increased tension in the laryngeal muscles produced by the autonomic nervous system's arousal response. A person who greets you in an unusually high-pitched voice (relative to what you know of their normal voice, or relative to what would be expected) may be experiencing significant emotional arousal. This is not diagnostic by itself — it is a signal to integrate with other behavioral data.

### **TEMPO AND RHYTHM**

Normal conversational speech has an even, contextually appropriate rhythm. Someone who speaks unusually rapidly (processing anxiety outpacing their verbal management) or unusually slowly (choosing words with unusual care, or experiencing cognitive load) deviates from baseline in ways worth attending to. Particularly significant are responses that arrive after an unusually long pause: the pause itself suggests that the response required more mental construction than a simple, truthful answer would have required.

### **VERBAL-NONVERBAL INCONGRUENCE**

When what someone says conflicts with what their body and face are doing simultaneously, the behavioral signal is almost always more truthful than the verbal one. The person who says "I'm doing great, just here to visit" while showing a micro-flash of fear and

touching their neck is telling you two different things. The skillful observer notes the incongruence without jumping to conclusions, and uses follow-up interaction to gather more information.

## **JDLR: "Just Doesn't Look Right"**

Security professionals across disciplines have a phrase for the amalgamated, pre-analytical sense that something is wrong: "JDLR" — "Just Doesn't Look Right." This intuitive alarm is not mystical. It is the product of your brain's pattern-recognition system registering a behavioral incongruence too quickly and subtly for your conscious analytical system to have processed and articulated it yet.

When you experience a JDLR signal, do not dismiss it. Do not apologize for it. Do not immediately act on it either. Instead, use it as a prompt: your pattern-recognition system has flagged something. Your analytical system's job is to identify what. Take a mental step back, review what you observed, and apply the cluster analysis framework (Chapter Seven) to determine whether the JDLR signal corresponds to real behavioral data or to a cognitive bias that is generating a false positive.

In many cases, analytical review will resolve the JDLR signal benignly — it was based on an unfamiliar cultural behavior, or an unusual but innocent characteristic of the individual. In some cases, analysis will surface the specific behavioral clusters that the pattern-recognition system detected before you consciously identified them. Those cases are the ones JDLR is designed to catch.

*"Your gut is not a lie detector. It is a pattern matcher. When it fires, ask what pattern it matched — and whether that pattern is behavioral data or cognitive bias."*

BEHAVIORAL SECURITY TRAINING PRINCIPLE

## Cognitive Load Indicators

Cognitive load refers to the mental effort being demanded of a person at any given moment. Someone who is managing a complex deception, rehearsing a cover story, managing anxiety, and simultaneously trying to appear normal is under extraordinary cognitive load. This load produces detectable behavioral artifacts:

- Reduced spontaneity in speech (responses feel constructed rather than naturally arising)
- Increased self-monitoring behaviors (touching the face, adjusting clothing, posture shifts)
- Reduced ability to process incoming information (delayed responses, failure to track conversational threads, blank look when new information is introduced)
- Reduced emotional animation (the face becomes more neutral and static as available cognitive resources are redirected to management tasks)
- Gaze aversion at moments of direct questioning, particularly about specific facts

These indicators are not proof of hostile intent. They are signals of a person who is working hard at something internal. That something may be entirely benign: a first-time visitor managing profound social anxiety, a grieving person trying to hold themselves together, a person with significant depression working to appear functional. The cognitive load indicators prompt closer observation and a warmer, more attentive greeting — not immediate security escalation.

### **Scenario: The Visitor Who Says "Just Visiting" But Shows Contempt**

A person approaches the door alone, makes adequate eye contact, and greets you normally. You extend your hand and say, "Welcome! Is this your first time visiting us?" They respond: "Yes, just visiting." As the words "just visiting" leave their mouth, you catch a micro-flash of what you identify as contempt — the asymmetrical, unilateral lip corner raise on the left side of their face, gone in less than a second, replaced immediately by a neutral expression.

What does this mean? As we will discuss in Chapter Five, contempt is the emotion most strongly associated with superiority and disdain. In this context, the micro-flash of contempt during the response "just visiting" could indicate: (1) contempt for the place they are visiting (which could indicate a hostile agenda or could simply mean they hold a low opinion of churches generally and are here reluctantly); (2) contempt for the question itself (a reaction to being asked to account for their presence); (3) contempt for the role

of greeter (some people experience scrutiny as insulting); or (4) contempt as a habitual emotional response that is unrelated to the current interaction.

The single micro-flash of contempt is a signal, not a verdict. The appropriate response is to continue the interaction warmly, extend an invitation to a follow-up question that allows more information to emerge, and alert a nearby team member to maintain soft observation of this individual until the picture resolves. It may resolve entirely — the person may enter, sit quietly through the service, and leave without incident. Or additional signals may emerge that elevate concern. Either way, you have been appropriately responsive without being either paranoid or blind.



### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: THE CONTACT-POINT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL**

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1. **The Dual-Processing Exercise:** During a low-stakes social event (a coffee hour, a church picnic, a community meeting), practice holding a normal conversation with someone while simultaneously maintaining a mental running log of their facial changes, voice quality, and body position. It will feel divided at first. Over time, the integration becomes natural.
2. **The JDLR Journal:** Keep a small notebook at your post. Every time you experience a JDLR signal about someone, write it down immediately after the interaction: what did you notice, what triggered the feeling, how did the interaction resolve, and was the JDLR signal accurate? Review monthly. You will discover your personal pattern-recognition strengths and biases.
3. **Voice Recording Analysis:** With a willing partner, record brief greeting exchanges and listen back. Attend to pitch changes, pauses before responses, and tempo variations. This trains paralinguistic awareness that real-time interaction does not always allow.

4. **The Incongruence Spotter:** For one service, make a mental note every time you observe even a minor incongruence between what someone says and what their body or face is doing. How often does it occur? What is the most common form? This exercise calibrates your sense of normal incongruence rates.
5. **The Contempt Practice:** Look up images of contempt expressions (asymmetrical unilateral lip corner raise) and practice recognizing the difference between contempt and a crooked smile. This distinction is one of the most operationally important in the entire microexpression toolkit and requires specific focused practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

# 5

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## The Seven Emotions and What They Look Like

*"The face is the most honest part of the human animal. Train yourself to read it, and the truth will find you."*

— Paul Ekman, paraphrased

### Reading the Map of Human Emotion

The seven universal emotions are not simply psychological categories. Each has a precise, measurable, and highly consistent facial signature — a specific combination of muscular contractions that produces a distinctive pattern of movement across the features of the face. Learning to read these signatures is the core technical skill of the behavioral observer, and it requires the same kind of dedicated study that any technical skill demands: deliberate practice, feedback, and progressive challenge.

In this chapter, we examine each of the seven emotions in detail: its facial signature, its neurological and motivational basis, its most likely manifestations in the church door context, and the

interpretive cautions that prevent misreading. We also address blended emotions — situations where multiple emotions are felt simultaneously and produce complex mixed facial expressions that require more refined analysis to read accurately.

## **Fear**

Fear is the emotion most directly relevant to the security context, and its facial signature is one of the clearest and most distinctive in Ekman's taxonomy.

### **THE FACIAL SIGNATURE**

Fear activates a specific set of muscular contractions: the inner and outer portions of the frontalis muscle raise and pull together the brows, producing a characteristic "raised-and-pulled-together" brow configuration unique to fear and sadness (though the two differ in the upper eyelid and lip patterns). The upper eyelids are raised, widening the eye opening. The lower eyelids are tensed slightly. The lip corners pull back and slightly downward, horizontally stretching the mouth. In full-intensity fear, the lower jaw may drop and the mouth open. These combined movements produce the recognizable "wide-eyed, lips drawn back" expression of acute fear.

### **WHAT FEAR AT THE CHURCH DOOR MEANS**

Fear in an arriving visitor may indicate many things, most of them requiring pastoral rather than security response. The person may be experiencing social anxiety about attending church for the first time. They may be a domestic violence survivor who is afraid of

being seen in public. They may be managing a personal crisis that has them in an acute stress state. They may be frightened by a specific circumstance they encountered before arriving.

Fear that is a security concern looks different in context: it typically accompanies other behavioral signals inconsistent with the above benign explanations (targeting gaze, concealment behavior, incongruent cover story), and it may appear as a microexpression rather than a sustained macro-expression, suggesting that the person is actively trying to suppress it while managing a high-stress situation. Even so, fear alone is never a sufficient basis for security action. It is a signal that warrants both pastoral attention and heightened observation.

*"Fear is the face's most legible signal. What matters is not whether you see it, but what you do with what you see: lead with care, observe with attention."*

CHURCH SECURITY TRAINING PRINCIPLE

## Anger

### THE FACIAL SIGNATURE

Anger pulls the brows down and together, producing the characteristic vertical furrows between the brows (the corrugator and procerus muscles contracting). The upper and lower eyelids both tense, producing a hard, intense quality to the gaze. The lips press together tightly (lip compression) or may thin and stretch slightly in a kind of jaw-set grimace. In high-intensity anger, the

jaw itself may be visibly set or clenched, and the nostrils may flare. The overall facial presentation has a forward, pressing quality — the face appears to be "pushing" toward its target.

## **DISTINGUISHING RIGHTEOUS ANGER FROM DANGEROUS ANGER**

Anger is a morally neutral emotion that can motivate anything from righteous advocacy to lethal violence. In the church door context, anger in an arriving individual may reflect: frustration with traffic on the way to church, upset about a personal or family situation, conflict with the institution itself (someone who has grievances with the church leadership), or, in rare but real cases, a hostile intent toward the congregation or specific individuals within it.

Contextual cues help distinguish these categories. Anger that is expressed openly, that resolves quickly into normal social interaction, and that does not come paired with concealment or targeting behaviors is likely ordinary frustration that has no security implications. Anger that is tightly suppressed (microexpression of anger rather than macroexpression), that accompanies a cover story that seems inconsistent with the emotional state, or that escalates rather than de-escalates through the greeting interaction warrants escalated attention.

## **Contempt**

## THE FACIAL SIGNATURE

Contempt has the most distinctive and easily identified of all the facial signatures: it is the only universal expression that is asymmetrical. A unilateral lip corner raise on one side of the face only — the lip corner tightening and pulling slightly upward on one side while the other side remains neutral — is the defining signature of contempt. This is sometimes described as a "smirk" in colloquial language, though a genuine contempt expression has a specific muscular quality (the zygomaticus minor and buccinator on one side only) that distinguishes it from a natural asymmetrical smile or from a smile that is not fully bilateral.

## THE MOST DANGEROUS EMOTION IN A CROWD

Ekman and colleagues have noted that contempt has a particularly concerning security profile. While fear may precede flight and anger may precede confrontation, contempt precedes a specific kind of cold, goal-directed aggression — the kind that sees the target as beneath moral consideration. Research on perpetrators of ideologically motivated violence consistently finds contemptuous attitudes toward the target group. Contempt in the context of a church security interaction — particularly contempt directed toward the congregation, the building, or its symbols — is the single microexpression signal most worthy of sustained follow-up observation.

It is critical to note that contempt, like all emotions, is not diagnostic in isolation. A person who flashes contempt at a religious institution may be an atheist who was dragged to a

relative's funeral, not a threat. The signal elevates concern; it does not determine action. The cluster analysis framework (Chapter Seven) is essential for assessing contempt in context.

## **Disgust**

### **THE FACIAL SIGNATURE**

Disgust is produced by a characteristic wrinkling of the nose (the nasalis muscle contracting) and raising of the upper lip (the levator labii superioris alaeque nasi). In more intense disgust, the cheeks may raise and the eyes narrow slightly. This is the expression the human face produces when something is perceived as foul, revolting, or morally offensive — the original evolutionary purpose was to prevent ingestion of toxic or contaminated substances, but it is now generalized to moral and social disgust as well.

### **DISCOMFORT VS. TARGETING BEHAVIOR**

In the church door context, disgust expressions typically indicate discomfort with something in the environment (a smell, a sight, a sound) or with the social interaction itself (the person finds the question intrusive or the setting uncomfortable). As a threat indicator, disgust directed specifically at the congregation, its symbols, or specific individuals — particularly when paired with contempt and anger in a cluster — may indicate moral revulsion toward the target that is a precursor to violence in ideologically motivated attackers.

## **Sadness**

### **THE FACIAL SIGNATURE**

Sadness has the most complex brow configuration in the set of universal emotions. The oblique pull of the frontalis muscle raises the inner corners of the brows while the corrugator suppresses the outer corners, producing a characteristic "tent" shape with the inner corners raised and the overall brow line downward toward the outer edges. The lip corners pull downward. The lower lip may quiver or push slightly forward. The overall facial expression has a downward, inward quality — the face appears to be collapsing slightly inward and downward under the weight of the emotion.

### **THE GRIEVING VISITOR NEEDS CARE, NOT SUSPICION**

Sadness is among the most common expressions you will encounter at a church door, particularly around funerals, memorial services, and during periods of congregational loss. The person who arrives with visible sadness — whether macro or micro — requires pastoral care as the primary response. A warm greeting, a gently extended hand, an unhurried moment of human presence — these responses honor the vulnerability that sadness represents and model the church's essential character as a place of comfort for the brokenhearted.

From a security perspective, sadness in isolation has no threat implications. Sadness paired with unusual behavioral signals (evasive behavior, concealment, targeting) may indicate a person in

crisis who poses a risk to themselves or others, and in such cases pastoral care and security awareness must be held simultaneously.

## **Surprise**

### **THE FACIAL SIGNATURE**

Surprise is the briefest of the universal emotions and the most reflexive. It is triggered by any unexpected sensory event and is characterized by: horizontal raising of both brows (the full frontalis contracts bilaterally), widening of the eyes (upper lids raise, lower lids may lower slightly), and dropping of the jaw with the mouth opening. The expression is entirely symmetrical and typically lasts less than a second before transitioning into the emotion that follows from the nature of the surprise (fear if the surprise was threatening, joy if pleasant, etc.).

### **GENUINE VS. FAKE SURPRISE**

The security relevance of surprise lies in distinguishing genuine from fabricated surprise. A person who claims to be surprised by information they clearly already knew will produce a surprise expression that lacks the spontaneous, reflexive quality of the genuine article — it may arrive a fraction of a second too late (after they have had time to decide to display it), last slightly too long (genuine surprise is brief), or fail to transition naturally into the follow-on emotion. This distinction is subtle and requires practice, but it is one of the most reliable microexpression-based signals of active deception.

## Happiness

### THE FACIAL SIGNATURE: DUCHENNE VS. SOCIAL SMILE

In 1862, the neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne identified the muscle that distinguishes a genuine smile from a social one: the orbicularis oculi, the muscle that encircles the eye. A genuine smile — which Ekman named the "Duchenne smile" in his honor — involves both the zygomaticus major (which raises the lip corners in any smile) and the orbicularis oculi (which compresses the lower eyelids, raises the cheeks, and produces the characteristic crow's feet at the outer corners of the eyes). The orbicularis oculi is notoriously resistant to voluntary control; most people cannot fire it deliberately on command without genuine positive emotion.

A social smile, by contrast, involves only the zygomaticus major — the lip corners rise, but the eyes remain relatively unchanged, retaining a quality that observers often describe as "the smile doesn't reach the eyes." Social smiles are not dishonest; they are the ordinary currency of polite social interaction. But when a person's facial expression is entirely social smiles — when even the moments that would ordinarily produce genuine happiness (a warm greeting, a welcomed familiar face) produce only the mechanical lip-corner raise with flat eyes — the absence of Duchenne smiling is itself a behavioral signal worth noting.

## Blended Emotions and Partial Expressions

In real-world behavioral observation, pure single-emotion expressions are actually less common than blended emotions — situations where two or more emotions are felt simultaneously and the face reflects this complexity. Common blends in the church security context include:

- **Fear and anger:** The face of someone who is both frightened and furious — common in people who feel threatened and are on the edge of a violent response
- **Sadness and contempt:** The face of someone who is grieving but also feels disdain for the institution or the people around them — a complex emotional state that warrants compassionate attention
- **Happiness and fear:** The face of someone whose excitement is tinged with anxiety — a first-time visitor who is genuinely interested but also genuinely nervous
- **Disgust and sadness:** The face of someone whose grief has turned to bitter disillusionment — a complex emotional state that may lead to withdrawn, uncommunicative behavior

Partial expressions — where only the upper or lower half of the face shows the emotion — occur when suppression is partial. The person manages to control either their brow area or their mouth area, but not both. A face with a smile in the mouth and neutral or tense eyes (partial happiness suppression), or a face with a neutral

mouth but tense, narrowed brows (partial anger suppression), both reveal emotional states that behavioral observers learn to read even in their attenuated form.

*"The face rarely tells a simple story. Its richness is in the complexity — the blends, the suppressions, the flickers. Read the whole face, not just the most obvious feature."*

ADVANCED MICROEXPRESSION TRAINING GUIDANCE

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: EMOTION IDENTIFICATION TRAINING GUIDE**

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For each of the seven emotions, practice recognition using the following image-based protocol:

1. **Happiness (Duchenne):** Find a photo of someone laughing genuinely. Look specifically at the eyes: are the lower lids compressed upward? Are there lines at the outer eye corners? Now find a photo of a polite/social smile from the same person. Note the difference in the eye region.
2. **Sadness:** Find a photo of someone in genuine grief. Locate the inner brow raise: the inner corners of the brows are pulled upward and slightly together, creating a characteristic oblique shape. Note the lip corners pointing downward.
3. **Fear:** Find a photo of genuine fear. Locate: brows raised and pulled together (inner corners up, creating a horizontal wrinkle in the center of the forehead), upper eyelids raised wide, lip corners pulled back. Practice distinguishing this from the similar brow configuration in sadness (in fear, both inner and outer brows are affected; in sadness, the raise is primarily inner).
4. **Anger:** Find a photo of genuine anger. Locate: brows pulled down and together creating vertical lines between them, hard-focused eyes with tensed lower lids, lips compressed or corners pulled slightly back.

5. **Contempt:** Find a photo of contempt. Identify the crucial asymmetry: one lip corner is raised and tightened; the other side of the face remains neutral. Practice distinguishing from a one-sided natural smile, which is softer and less controlled-looking.
6. **Disgust:** Find a photo of disgust. Locate the nose wrinkle (upper nose skin creasing) and the raised upper lip on both sides (distinguishing from contempt's unilateral raise).
7. **Surprise:** Find a photo of genuine surprise. Note the horizontal brow raise (both sides fully elevated), the widened eyes, the dropped jaw. Practice rapid recognition by flashing such images briefly before covering them.

After each session, practice identifying the same emotions in video footage — start at half-speed, then try full speed. Commit to at least 10 minutes per day for 30 days for meaningful skill development.

CHAPTER SIX

# 6

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## Body Language Beyond the Face

*"The body is never silent. The art is in learning to hear it."*

— Joe Navarro, *What Every Body Is Saying*

### Beyond the Face

The face receives the lion's share of attention in behavioral analysis training, and for good reason: it is the richest single source of emotional information available to the observer. But it is not the only source. The human body is a comprehensive broadcast system, communicating intent, emotional state, physical readiness, and cognitive load through every major region from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. A behavioral observer who reads only the face is reading one channel of a multi-channel broadcast. This chapter develops the others.

The concept that anchors this chapter is Joe Navarro's observation that the further from the brain a body part is, the less conscious control a person exercises over it. The face, closest to the conscious brain, is where most deliberate expression management happens. The torso is less controlled. The hands and arms less still.

The legs and feet — farthest from the conscious brain in the network of our habits of self-monitoring — are among the most honest parts of the body.

## **Torso Orientation: Where the Body "Wants to Go"**

The torso is the body's direction indicator. The shoulders, chest, and hips naturally orient themselves toward what the person is interested in, moving toward, or committed to. In normal social interaction, a person fully engaged in conversation with you will orient their torso toward you — what social scientists call "full frontal engagement." A person who has partially or fully disengaged will turn their torso away, even while their face remains toward you — the feet and hips already pointed in the direction they intend to go.

In the church door context, watch for torso orientation that is inconsistent with the stated purpose of the visit. A person who says they are excited to be at church but whose torso is angled toward the exit rather than the interior is showing a physical desire to leave that their words are contradicting. A person whose torso is oriented toward specific individuals within the building (rather than toward the greeter, toward the service area, or in a direction consistent with general exploration) may be tracking those individuals in a way worth noting.

## **Self-Soothing Behaviors: The Body Under Stress**

When the brain's limbic system (the emotion processing center that includes the amygdala) detects a stressor, it triggers pacifying behaviors — physical self-comforting actions that reduce the neurological stress response. These behaviors are largely automatic, outside of conscious control, and almost universally interpreted by trained observers as indicating elevated stress. Key self-soothing behaviors include:

### **NECK TOUCH AND NECK COVER**

The neck is one of the most vulnerable regions of the human body, and the hand's impulse to cover or touch it under stress is a limbic-driven protective response. The ventral neck (front, particularly the sternal notch at the base of the throat) is particularly significant: touching this area is one of the most reliable real-time indicators of discomfort, anxiety, or insecurity. Women most commonly touch the sternal notch area; men more often grab or squeeze the sides of the neck or the back of the neck. Both forms are significant self-soothing signals.

### **WRIST GRAB**

One hand gripping the opposite wrist, often held in front of or behind the body, is a comfort behavior typically associated with anxiety, nervousness, or the need to restrain an impulse. It is particularly common in individuals who are trying to hold themselves still under stress.

## FACE TOUCHING

Touching the face — particularly the nose, mouth, cheek, or chin — increases under conditions of stress and cognitive load. Touching the mouth area (chin, lips, below the lower lip) is particularly common during moments of uncertainty or deception. The hand appears to be attempting to cover or restrain words that the person does not want to say.

## HAIR MANIPULATION

Running fingers through the hair, touching the scalp, or playing with a strand of hair are all pacifying behaviors that typically indicate discomfort, boredom, or stress. Context determines significance: a nervous visitor touching their hair during a greeting interaction is showing stress; a person who does so every time a security team member comes near is showing something worth noting.

*"Every time a person touches their own neck under stress, their body is telling you what their words may be trying to conceal: I am not comfortable here."*

JOE NAVARRO, BEHAVIORAL ANALYST, FORMER FBI  
AGENT

## **Freeze, Flight, Fight: Reading Pre-Behavioral Cues**

The autonomic nervous system's response to threat has three phases, each with observable behavioral manifestations. Understanding these phases allows the trained observer to read escalating threat arousal before it reaches action.

### **FREEZE**

The freeze response is the nervous system's first reaction to a perceived threat: stop moving to avoid detection, assess the situation, prepare for the next response. In humans, this manifests as sudden stillness — movement that abruptly ceases, a person who "freezes" in place for a fraction of a second when they perceive a threatening stimulus (such as a security team member they did not expect to encounter). Brief freezes are normal and unremarkable. Extended or repeated freeze responses — particularly at specific triggers — suggest a threat-detection response to those triggers.

### **FLIGHT**

Flight preparedness shows up in the body before physical flight occurs: weight shifts to the balls of the feet, the torso angles away from the source of threat, the legs may "point" toward exits, and pacifying behaviors increase. A person who, upon seeing or interacting with security personnel, shifts their body weight and angle toward the nearest exit and begins displaying self-soothing

behaviors may be in pre-flight arousal — which may indicate that they are frightened of something in their environment, or that they are considering leaving before doing something they planned to do.

## **FIGHT**

Pre-fight arousal shows up as: rigid body posture (the musculature tensing in preparation for physical action), elevated chin (a dominance and territorial signal), compressed lips and set jaw, direct and hard eye contact (staring rather than ordinary gaze), and sometimes a very deliberate slowing of movement as the person manages escalating adrenaline. A person showing multiple pre-fight indicators who has not yet been confronted should trigger immediate team communication and escalation protocols.

## **Adaptors, Illustrators, and Emblems**

Behavioral scientists categorize purposeful hand and arm movements into three types:

### **ADAPTORS**

Adaptors are self-directed behaviors (touching oneself, adjusting clothing, handling objects) that are performed to manage discomfort or arousal. They are the largest category of self-soothing behaviors and, as noted above, are reliably associated with elevated stress levels. The frequency and intensity of adaptor behavior tracks the intensity of the underlying emotional state.

## ILLUSTRATORS

Illustrators are hand and arm movements that accompany and literally illustrate speech — the gestures people make when they say "it was this big" or "over there" or "one after another." Illustrator frequency tends to decline when a person is under cognitive load or actively managing their speech for deception — because the cognitive resources that normally generate spontaneous illustrators are occupied with other tasks. A person who normally gestures expressively (their personal baseline) but becomes very still when answering specific questions may be allocating unusual cognitive resources to those answers.

## EMBLEMS

Emblems are culturally specific gestures with defined meanings — the thumbs-up, the wave, the pointing finger, the "OK" sign. They are relevant to security observation primarily when they appear as partial emblems — a gesture that is almost completed and then suppressed. A partial emblem is a "slipped" piece of communication: the body started to say something the person decided not to say, and a trained observer catches the slip.

## Leg and Foot Behavior

As Joe Navarro has extensively documented, the feet and legs are among the most truthful parts of the body precisely because most people give them very little conscious attention. We are aware of managing our face; we are somewhat aware of managing our hands

and posture; we almost never think about what our feet are doing. This inattention makes foot behavior a particularly reliable window into genuine emotional and motivational states.

Feet pointing toward exits (rather than toward the person with whom one is speaking) signal a desire to leave. Feet that bounce or jiggle during a seated conversation signal nervous energy or excitement. Feet that turn inward (pigeon-toed) signal discomfort, self-consciousness, or retreat. Feet that are rooted, flat, and completely still may indicate extreme tension as the person attempts to control every aspect of their presentation. When observing someone in the greeting or check-in interaction, an occasional downward glance at their feet — inconspicuously, during natural pauses in the conversation — can provide useful confirming or disconfirming information for your overall behavioral assessment.

## Clothing and Concealment

The security observer's awareness of clothing is not about profiling based on style, brand, or appearance. It is about identifying clothing configurations that are inconsistent with weather, context, or the stated purpose of the visit. Specific indicators:

- **Weather-inappropriate layering:** A heavy coat or jacket worn in warm weather may be providing concealment. This is a recognized pre-attack indicator and warrants careful observation of the other behavioral signals discussed throughout this book.

- **Asymmetric weight or bulge:** Clothing that hangs or moves asymmetrically, suggesting weight on one side or an object under the fabric, is worth noting — particularly when accompanied by the behavioral pattern of touching or securing that side of the body.
- **Ill-fitting clothing:** Clothing that appears to have been put on quickly, that is significantly larger than the person's frame (creating concealment space), or that is worn in unusual ways may indicate hurried dressing or deliberate concealment.

These observations must always be integrated with other behavioral data. A person wearing a large jacket on a warm day who also shows a normal, relaxed behavioral signature, greets warmly, makes natural eye contact, and proceeds to normal congregational activities has almost certainly resolved any concern raised by the clothing observation.

## Bag and Package Behavior

The behavior of an individual toward the bags or packages they carry is as informative as the bags themselves. Behavioral indicators include:

- Holding a bag unusually close to the body with both arms wrapped around it
- Placing a bag in a position that provides visual concealment from greeters or security personnel
- Repeatedly checking or adjusting a bag during the arrival interaction

- Showing a significant change in behavior when asked about the bag's contents
- Entering with a bag large enough to conceal a substantial object, combined with other behavioral signals of elevated stress or concealment

*"The legs and feet tell you where the body wants to go. The hands tell you what the body plans to do. Watch both, and you will know more than words can reveal."*

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION TRAINING

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: SILENT PEOPLE-WATCHING AT PUBLIC VENUES**

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This is one of the best training exercises available for building body language vocabulary. It requires no materials and can be done anywhere.

1. **Choose a public observation post:** A food court, a busy lobby, a park bench near a pedestrian path, or any other public place where you can observe people without appearing intrusive. Sit comfortably and observe for 20–30 minutes.
2. **Focus on torso and legs only:** For the first session, consciously ignore faces and attend only to torso orientation and leg/foot behavior. Where is each person's torso pointing? What are their feet doing? Do their feet point toward the people they're talking to, or away? Describe three people in detail in a notebook.
3. **Focus on hands in session two:** In a subsequent session, focus exclusively on hand behavior. Are people using adaptors (touching themselves), illustrators (gesturing to accompany speech), or emblems? What do the hands reveal that the face does not?

4. **Self-soothing inventory:** In a third session, count every instance of a self-soothing behavior (neck touch, face touch, hair manipulation, wrist grab) you observe in a 20-minute period. Note which stressors seem to trigger them (beginning of an interaction, a specific point in a conversation, a transition in the environment).
5. **Integration session:** In a final session, attempt to integrate all body regions — face, torso, hands, legs — for each person you observe for two to three minutes. Write a one-paragraph behavioral portrait of each person, describing your overall assessment of their emotional state and intent based on everything you observed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# 7

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## Clusters — Never One Signal Alone

*"One swallow does not a summer make. And one behavioral cue does not a threat make."*

— Adapted from Aristotle

### The Unreliability of Single Cues

Every error in behavioral observation — every paranoid false positive, every catastrophic false negative — can be traced to one of two failures: over-reliance on a single cue, or failure to notice a cluster. The single-cue error is the more seductive of the two. A microexpression of contempt is dramatic; it feels meaningful; it feels like a signal that demands action. And it is meaningful — as one data point in a larger picture. But a person who flashes contempt and whose every other behavioral signal is entirely consistent with a benign explanation presents a very different risk profile from a person who flashes contempt and who also shows pre-flight body language, a rigidly managed cover story, and behavioral incongruence.

The cluster principle is the single most important methodological discipline in behavioral observation. It states: do not interpret any single behavioral signal as meaningful in isolation. Require three or more congruent signals — signals that independently point in the same interpretive direction — before elevating your assessment. This discipline dramatically reduces false positives (which harm innocent individuals and erode the security team's credibility) while maintaining sensitivity to genuine threats.

## The Cluster Principle: Three or More Congruent Signals

What does a meaningful cluster look like? Consider two contrasting scenarios:

**Scenario A:** A person arrives alone, shows a micro-flash of contempt during the greeting exchange, and enters the building. Single signal. Contempt is the most operationally significant of the seven emotions, but one uncontextualized flash does not constitute a cluster. Maintain awareness. No escalation yet.

**Scenario B:** A person arrives alone (behavioral anomaly in the context of your typical family-unit congregation). They show a micro-flash of contempt during the greeting. Their torso is oriented toward the interior of the building rather than toward the greeter (suggesting their attention is already inside). Their hands are pressed against their sides with unusual rigidity. They provide a brief, unconvincing cover story ("just visiting") and immediately break eye contact after delivering it. Their feet are already past the greeting threshold before the social exchange is complete.

Scenario B presents a cluster of five congruent signals: solo arrival pattern, contempt microexpression, unusual torso orientation, rigid hands, and eye contact break after a thin cover story. Each signal by itself has an innocent explanation. Together, they form a pattern that warrants immediate soft intervention and team communication.

*"The skilled observer does not react to single signals. They wait for the pattern to emerge — and they have the patience and the training to know what a pattern looks like when it forms."*

THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING DOCTRINE

## Hot Spots: Sudden Changes from Baseline

Within any given interaction, a "hot spot" is a specific moment at which a person's behavior changes significantly — a sudden shift from their baseline pattern within the conversation itself. Hot spots are among the most valuable signals available in real-time interaction because they show you exactly where the emotional or cognitive pressure is.

Hot spots can be triggered by a word, a question, a name, a gesture, or a stimulus in the environment. The transition is the signal: what were they doing before, and what changed? Common hot spot patterns include:

- A person who is conversationally relaxed and becomes suddenly still when a specific question is asked

- A person whose pacifying behaviors (self-soothing) dramatically increase at a specific point in the conversation
- A person whose eye contact breaks specifically when a particular fact is introduced
- A person who shows a microexpression of fear or contempt specifically at a particular word or name

When you identify a hot spot, probe gently. A casual, open follow-up question directed at the hot-spot topic — "Oh, have you been to our church before?" or "Were you looking for anyone specific?" — will either reveal an innocent explanation for the reaction or produce additional behavioral data that clarifies the picture.

## **Congruence Testing: Does the Story Match the Body?**

Congruence testing is the discipline of comparing what a person is saying with what their body and face are doing at the same moment. Normal, truthful, emotionally engaged communication is characterized by a high degree of congruence: the person's words, facial expressions, vocal qualities, and body language all point in the same direction. Deception and concealment typically produce incongruence: the managed verbal story diverges from the involuntary physical signals.

Common incongruence patterns in the church door context include:

- Positive verbal content ("I'm so happy to be here!") paired with suppressed negative emotional expression (flat eyes, minimal animation, absence of Duchenne smile)

- Casual verbal framing ("Just visiting, no particular reason") paired with pre-flight body language (angled torso, feet toward exit, increased self-soothing)
- Confident verbal delivery paired with high-frequency pacifying behaviors
- Stated familiarity with the church ("Oh yes, I've heard a lot about this place") paired with environmental scanning behavior inconsistent with prior knowledge of the space

No single incongruence is definitive. But patterns of incongruence — verbal and nonverbal signals repeatedly diverging in the same direction — are among the strongest behavioral indicators of deliberate management of presentation that the observer will encounter.

## Contextual Weighting

The same gesture means different things in different moments. Crossed arms mean something different in a cold, drafty foyer than in a warm room; eyes downcast in a grieving visitor at a funeral mean something different than eyes downcast in someone who cannot maintain eye contact while describing their purpose for visiting. The skilled observer applies contextual weighting: adjusting the interpretive significance of each signal based on the environmental, social, and interpersonal context in which it occurs.

Contextual weighting requires that the observer hold multiple alternative hypotheses simultaneously. For any given behavioral cluster, ask: "What is the most likely benign explanation for this pattern? What is the most plausible concerning explanation? Which

additional signals would discriminate between them?" This metacognitive discipline prevents both paranoia and blindness by keeping the analytical process genuinely open.

## **Avoiding Confirmation Bias in Observation**

We addressed cognitive biases in Chapter Two. Confirmation bias deserves a second treatment here because it is the cluster analysis stage at which it most dangerously operates. Once you have mentally assembled a preliminary cluster — "this person is showing contempt, avoidant eye contact, and rigid body posture" — your brain's pattern-completion system will eagerly search for additional signals that confirm the emerging picture and ignore signals that contradict it. This is the moment of maximum vulnerability to false positive error.

The antidote is disciplined disconfirmation-seeking. Once you have assembled a preliminary cluster, actively look for evidence that contradicts your assessment. Has the person shown any genuinely warm or spontaneous expression? Are there aspects of their behavior that are entirely consistent with benign explanation? Have you correctly accounted for cultural and individual variation in their baseline? A preliminary cluster that survives rigorous disconfirmation searching is a much more reliable basis for escalation than one that was never tested.

## Case Study: The Angry Visitor Who Was Grieving

A church security volunteer described the following incident in a training debrief:

A man arrived alone at a Sunday service. His face was set, his jaw tight, his brow furrowed — all consistent with the anger expression. His posture was rigid. He avoided the normal social niceties of the greeting exchange, responding minimally and moving past quickly. The volunteer's initial assessment was anger — and because of the cluster of signals (solo arrival, facial anger expression, rigid posture, social avoidance), they quietly alerted a second team member to maintain awareness.

During the service, the man sat in the back row. At one point, the pastor spoke about loss and the grace of God for those who mourn. The volunteer, now seated nearby, watched the man's face change completely: the anger dissolved, the jaw released, and he began to weep silently. After the service, the volunteer approached him. He had just returned from burying his brother. The "anger" the volunteer had observed was grief so acute and tightly controlled that it had passed through anger on its way to expression.

This case illustrates several important cluster principles simultaneously. First: the cluster analysis was correct in identifying behavioral deviation from baseline — the man was not behaving normally. Second: the response to that deviation (soft awareness, positioning for pastoral engagement, no confrontation) was appropriate given the ambiguity of the signals. Third: the resolution

revealed that the cluster indicated distress, not threat — and that resolution shaped a pastoral response that the man later described as one of the most significant moments of his grief journey.

*"The cluster principle protects two people simultaneously: the innocent visitor from unwarranted suspicion, and the congregation from genuine threat. Both protections require the same discipline."*

CHURCH SECURITY TRAINING DOCTRINE

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION: BUILDING YOUR CLUSTER ANALYSIS SKILL

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1. **The Three-Signal Threshold Rule:** Write this on a card and keep it at your post for 30 days: "I will not elevate my assessment of any individual without three independent congruent signals." Review this card at the beginning of every shift. The discipline of requiring three signals before escalation will dramatically improve both your accuracy and your fairness.
2. **Hot Spot Mapping:** During your next several greeting interactions, note every moment when a person's behavior changes distinctly within the conversation. What triggered the change? What changed? Did the change resolve (returning to baseline) or persist? Build a mental catalog of common benign hot spots (nervousness at the moment of extended hand, relief when the interaction is warm) against which to recognize genuinely anomalous ones.
3. **The Congruence Scorecard:** For any interaction that gives you mild concern, mentally rate congruence on a 1–5 scale: 5 = full congruence (words and body fully match), 1 = significant incongruence across multiple channels. A score of 3 or below, in the context of other concerning signals, warrants continued attention. A score of 4 or 5 should substantially reduce concern regardless of any single dramatic signal you may have noticed.

**4. The Alternative Hypothesis Exercise:** After any shift in which you identified someone as "concerning," write down: (1) your primary hypothesis about why they concerned you, and (2) three alternative benign hypotheses that would explain the same behavioral observations. This practice prevents premature fixation on a single interpretive frame.

CHAPTER EIGHT

# 8

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## Special Situations and Populations

*"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."*

— Matthew 18:5

### The Spectrum of Visitors

The church door receives everyone. It is precisely this indiscriminate openness — the theological conviction that no one is beyond the reach of grace — that makes the behavioral observer's task both more complex and more important than a standard security assignment. You are not screening for a narrow threat profile; you are attending to every human being who arrives, many of whom carry circumstances that require sensitivity, adaptation, and specialized knowledge to read accurately. This chapter addresses the most significant special populations and situations you will encounter, and how behavioral observation must be adapted for each.

## Grieving Attendees

Grief is one of the most powerful behavioral modifiers available. It alters facial expression, gait, posture, social interaction patterns, and cognitive processing in ways that can, to the untrained observer, superficially resemble several threat-indicator behaviors. The person in acute grief may appear dissociated (blank expression, slow gait, minimal social response), agitated (restless movement, inability to settle, brief bursts of tears or anger), or withdrawn (avoiding eye contact, speaking minimally, moving quickly to a seat and avoiding interaction).

The primary behavioral frame for funerals and memorial services is grief, not threat. Every behavioral anomaly you observe should first be interpreted through the grief lens. A person who appears dazed, moves slowly, and responds minimally to your greeting is almost certainly in shock or deep sorrow — not surveilling the venue. A person who appears barely controlled, whose face shows alternating sadness and anger, is almost certainly managing the volatile emotional mix of loss — not a pre-attack state.

Adapt your greeting for grieving visitors: softer voice, less verbal content, more physical presence (a held door, a gentle hand on the arm if culturally appropriate), and genuine unhurried attention. "I'm so sorry for your loss. Please let us know if there's anything we can do for you." These words, delivered genuinely, accomplish two things: they model the church's pastoral care, and

they open a brief human moment in which any genuinely concerning behavioral signals would be more visible against the backdrop of the natural grace of your response.

## **Mentally Ill Visitors**

Houses of worship are frequently sought out by individuals experiencing mental illness, sometimes because of a genuine spiritual dimension to their experience, sometimes because the church represents a safe and accessible community when other support systems have failed, and sometimes because the content of their mental experience (religious themes, spiritual voices, messianic identities) naturally orients them toward religious institutions. The behavioral presentation of mental illness is extremely varied, but several patterns are worth understanding:

## **PSYCHOSIS**

A person experiencing active psychosis may appear to be responding to stimuli that are not present — looking at or speaking to things others cannot see, or with unusual intensity and distraction. Their affect may be flat or inappropriately bright. Their speech may be disorganized. Their behavior may be unpredictable. Most people experiencing psychosis are not violent; the vast majority of violence in our society is not committed by people with mental illness. The compassionate response is warmth, calm, and patience, with a gentle introduction of a pastoral team member who can provide appropriate care.

## **CRISIS STATES**

An individual in a mental health crisis — suicidal ideation, acute anxiety attack, dissociative episode — may arrive at the church door in a state that is behaviorally alarming to an untrained observer. They may be trembling, tearful, incoherent, or frozen. The primary response is de-escalation and pastoral engagement, not security posturing. Calm, grounded, physically non-threatening engagement from a security team member trained in de-escalation techniques can be the bridge to crisis intervention resources.

## **WHEN TO ESCALATE**

The threshold for involving law enforcement with a mentally ill visitor is the presence of specific, credible, current threat behavior — not simply disturbing behavior. A person who is speaking loudly, behaving in a disorganized way, or appearing acutely distressed does not thereby pose a physical threat. A person who is making specific threats toward identified individuals, displaying a weapon, or whose behavior has escalated to physical agitation directed at others requires immediate emergency response. Know this line and train your team to respect it.

## **Individuals Under the Influence of Substances**

Alcohol and drug intoxication produce a predictable range of behavioral changes that the trained observer can recognize: altered gait (unsteady, wide-based, slowed), slurred or rapid speech, pupil changes (dilation or constriction depending on substance), emotional lability (rapidly shifting affect, unusual intensity),

disinhibited social behavior (boundary violations, loudness, unexpected physical contact), and impaired judgment and impulse control.

A person arriving at church under the influence of substances is not automatically a security risk. They are, however, someone who requires careful management: their impaired judgment and emotional volatility increase the probability of unpredictable behavior, and their physical state may be a sign of crisis (a person who has been drinking heavily all day before coming to church may be in acute crisis). Pastoral engagement that is warm but firm, designed to assess the person's immediate safety needs and connect them with appropriate care, is the appropriate response in most cases. If the person is visibly intoxicated to a degree that puts themselves or others at risk, gentle redirection away from the congregation (to a private space where pastoral care can be offered, or, if necessary, to emergency services) may be warranted.

## **Domestic Violence Victims**

One of the most important and most frequently missed special populations at the church door is the domestic violence survivor. Church attendance is, for many survivors, one of the few activities they pursue independently — a brief window of freedom and community outside the controlled environment of an abusive relationship. The behavioral presentation of a domestic violence survivor in this context may include:

- Hypervigilance — looking around frequently, watching for a specific person, checking the door repeatedly

- Flinching at unexpected sounds or movements
- Visible injury or injury inadequately explained by a cover story
- Fear expression in response to questions about their safety or circumstances
- Sudden changes in behavior when a specific person approaches
- Reluctance to give contact information or respond to questions about their home situation

The church security team's role with domestic violence survivors is protective, not investigative. Create a private, safe space for the conversation if your observation suggests this person is in danger. Know your local domestic violence resources. Offer information without pressure. And be alert to the possibility that the abusive partner may also appear at the church door looking for this person — a scenario that requires an entirely different security response.

## **Children and Youth in Distress**

Children communicate distress differently than adults. They are less likely to have the verbal framework to describe what is wrong, less likely to seek help directly, and may have been specifically coached by an abuser not to disclose. Behavioral signals of child distress at the church door include:

- Clinging to or avoiding the accompanying adult in ways inconsistent with the child's developmental stage

- Flinching or freezing when the accompanying adult makes sudden movements
- Visible injury or unusual wariness about contact with adults
- A child who becomes notably calmer or more relaxed once separated from the accompanying adult
- A child who is being restrained from normal childhood expression by an unusually controlling adult

Mandatory reporting laws in most jurisdictions require certain categories of professionals and volunteers to report reasonable suspicions of child abuse. Know your church's policy on this. Know your state's mandatory reporting requirements. And know that the most protective thing you can do for a child showing signs of distress is ensure that a trained pastoral staff member is given the opportunity to interact with that child in a safe, appropriate setting.

## **High-Profile Events and Elevated Risk Profiles**

Easter, Christmas, and major special events bring elevated risk alongside elevated attendance. The key operational differences for high-attendance events:

- Lower percentage of known faces requires more systematic behavioral screening at entry points
- Higher crowd density inside creates more complex observation conditions and more difficult response scenarios
- Elevated emotional intensity (family gatherings, nostalgia, spiritual significance) can mask or amplify behavioral signals

- Media presence at special events can create an additional attraction for individuals seeking notoriety
- Security team communication must be pre-planned for high-noise, high-density environments where normal voice communication fails

For every high-profile event, conduct a pre-event security brief with your full team: review expected attendance, identify any specific threats or concerns in your environment, assign observation posts explicitly, establish clear escalation and communication protocols, and designate a senior team member as command and control. These thirty minutes of preparation are among the highest-value investments your security team can make.

## **Active Threat Pre-Indicators for Houses of Worship**

The research on targeted violence at religious institutions identifies several pre-incident behaviors that, in combination, warrant notification of law enforcement. Unlike the behavioral signals discussed throughout this book (which are the raw material of real-time assessment), these pre-incident indicators often come from sources outside the immediate security environment — congregation members, online monitoring, community reports:

- Explicit or implicit threats communicated verbally, in writing, or online against the congregation or its members
- Prior incidents of harassment, intimidation, or stalking directed at the institution or specific individuals

- Evidence of detailed research or planning targeting the institution (maps, schedules, personnel information acquired from unusual sources)
- A history of grievance toward the religious community combined with recent destabilizing life events (job loss, relationship failure, legal crisis)
- Acquisition of weapons or materials inconsistent with prior patterns, combined with any of the above

None of these indicators is sufficient in isolation to trigger law enforcement notification. In combination, with clear behavioral data, they constitute a referral to your local threat assessment partnership — typically the FBI field office or local law enforcement behavioral analysis unit — for professional assessment.

*"The church door sees all manner of human need. Behavioral observation, held with compassion, is how we match the response to what is actually needed — care, protection, crisis intervention, or pastoral presence."*

CHURCH SECURITY MINISTRY DOCTRINE

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: SPECIALIZED VISITOR RESPONSE PROTOCOLS**

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1. **Develop three specific scripts:** Write out and practice brief, warm greeting exchanges tailored for: (a) a visibly grieving visitor, (b) a visitor who appears to be in mental health distress, and (c) a visitor who appears to be under the influence of substances. Role-play these with your security team before your next major event.
2. **Resource card:** Prepare a small card you can discreetly share with visitors in crisis: local domestic violence hotline, mental health crisis line, and pastoral care contact. Know how to offer it without embarrassing the recipient.
3. **Child safety protocol:** Ensure every member of your security team knows: your church's mandatory reporting policy, the name of the designated child safety officer, and how to create a safe opportunity for a child to speak privately with a trusted adult.
4. **High-attendance event planning template:** Create a one-page planning checklist for high-attendance events that covers: team assignments, communication protocols, entry procedures, pastoral care integration, and law enforcement liaison contact. Review and update it before every Easter, Christmas, and major event.

CHAPTER NINE

# 9

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## Communication and Team Protocol

*"Individual commitment to a group effort — that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."*

— Vince Lombardi

### The Observation Team

Behavioral observation is not a solo discipline. Individual observers are limited by their field of view, their attention span, their cognitive load in any given moment, and their individual perceptual biases. A well-organized security team dramatically multiplies the individual observer's effectiveness by distributing attention across space, providing second opinions on ambiguous signals, and ensuring that concerning individuals are not lost to observation when one team member is occupied with another interaction.

Effective team communication is the connective tissue that transforms a group of individually trained observers into a cohesive security function. This chapter addresses the mechanics of that communication: how to share information without alarming the congregation, how to use standard protocols to convey the specifics of a behavioral observation, how to apply structured decision-making frameworks (particularly the OODA loop) to escalating situations, and how to handle the legal and procedural dimensions of security incidents involving removal or law enforcement contact.

## **Communicating Observations Without Alarming the Congregation**

The congregation is not a passive background to the security operation; it is the community you are protecting. Alarming that community through visible security activity — obvious pointing, loud discussions between team members about a specific individual, team members rushing toward a location without an apparent purpose — serves nobody. It frightens innocent people, alerts any individual of concern that they are under observation, and damages the culture of welcome that is the church's fundamental gift to its visitors.

The principles for communication in the church security context are: normal tone, normal movement, and specific information. A team member who has identified a concerning individual should communicate with another team member through a natural-appearing interaction (a brief side conversation, a radio

earpiece exchange, a text message), using pre-established code language or behavioral descriptors, and using body language that does not direct attention to the subject of the communication.

## Hand Signals and Code Words

Every church security team should develop a simple, standardized system of non-verbal signals and code words for use in public environments where verbal communication would be overhead or disruptive. An effective system is:

- **Simple:** No more than 8–10 signals or codes. Complex systems are not retained under stress.
- **Intuitive:** The signal should have a natural connection to its meaning wherever possible (e.g., a hand on the shoulder might signal "pastoral care needed"; a hand resting on the radio might signal "potential concern, continue observation").
- **Pre-trained:** Every team member must have practiced the system enough to execute it without deliberate thought. Signal systems that require conscious recall fail under stress.

Common categories of signals and codes to develop:

- *Continue observing subject* (non-escalatory awareness)
- *Soft intervention requested* (send a second team member to engage this person)
- *Pastoral care needed* (distressed visitor requires pastoral team contact)
- *Escalate to team lead* (concern requires senior assessment)

- *Alert status* — *contact law enforcement* (situation has escalated to emergency protocols)
- *All clear* (situation resolved without further action)

## The OODA Loop in Church Security

The OODA loop — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — was developed by military strategist John Boyd as a model for rapid decision-making in dynamic, high-stakes environments. It has been widely adopted in security, law enforcement, and emergency response as a framework for structuring situational awareness and action under pressure. Applied to the church security context:

### OBSERVE

Gather raw behavioral data through all the channels covered in this book: facial expressions, body language, gait, voice quality, clothing, and environmental context. This is the input stage — the more comprehensive and accurate your observation, the better the quality of everything that follows. Observation is continuous; it does not stop when you have initiated an interaction.

### ORIENT

Interpret the observed data against your behavioral baseline, your knowledge of the individual and their context, and the broader situational factors (what kind of event is this, what is the time of day, what other dynamics are present). Orientation is where cognitive biases most dangerously operate — this is where you must apply the cluster analysis principles of Chapter Seven and seek disconfirming evidence before fixing your interpretation.

## DECIDE

Select a response from the available options, scaled to the current level of assessed concern: continue observation, initiate soft intervention, escalate to team lead, or initiate emergency protocols. Decisions should be as deliberate as the time available allows — and in most behavioral security situations, you have more time than the urgency of the moment suggests. The most dangerous decision-making errors occur when observers skip Orient and move directly from Observe to Act.

## ACT

Execute the decided response with calm, confidence, and minimum disruption to the congregation. Then immediately cycle back to Observe: how did the person respond to your action? Did the concern increase or decrease? Is additional decision-making required?

*"The OODA loop is not a diagram on a training slide. It is the rhythm of good decision-making under pressure. Practice it until it is as natural as breathing."*

SECURITY DOCTRINE TRAINING

## **Soft Intervention: Engaging a Concerning Visitor Warmly**

Soft intervention is the most important and most underutilized tool in the church security toolkit. It is a deliberate, warm, probing interaction with a visitor about whom you have rising concern — conducted in a way that is indistinguishable, to the observer, from ordinary hospitality.

The goals of soft intervention are: (1) to gather additional behavioral data by observing the person's response to direct engagement; (2) to disrupt the momentum of any planning or mental preparation the person may be engaged in; and (3) to create a human connection that may, in some cases, be precisely what a distressed individual needed to shift out of a crisis trajectory.

Soft intervention scripts should be warm, specific, and question-based. For example: "Good morning! Welcome. I noticed you came in alone today — is this your first time visiting us? Can I show you around and get you connected with someone?" Or: "I wanted to come check on you — you look like you might have had a tough week. Is there anything I can pray with you about, or get you in touch with one of our pastoral team?" The tone is one of genuine care. The function is also behavioral intelligence-gathering.

## Escalation Thresholds

Every security team must have clear, shared, pre-established criteria for escalation to each level of response. These criteria should be documented, trained, and reviewed regularly. A simple four-tier escalation framework:

- **Tier 1 — Awareness:** Behavioral anomaly observed. Continue normal observation. No team communication required unless behavior changes.
- **Tier 2 — Soft Monitoring:** Concerning behavioral cluster identified. Alert team lead by pre-established signal. A second team member moves to a position of passive observation of the subject.
- **Tier 3 — Soft Intervention:** Cluster is confirmed and elevated. Team lead authorizes direct pastoral/security engagement with the subject. At least two team members in proximity.
- **Tier 4 — Emergency Response:** Specific, credible, imminent threat is identified OR the subject has initiated a harmful action. Call 911. Execute your active threat response protocol. Team lead takes command.

## After-Action Review

The highest-performing security teams in any sector share one discipline: they conduct structured after-action reviews (AARs) following every significant incident — and many conduct brief

AARs after every service, regardless of whether incidents occurred. The AAR asks four questions:

1. What did we observe and how did we assess it?
2. What actions did we take and were they appropriate?
3. What was the outcome?
4. What would we do differently?

The AAR is not a blame exercise. It is a learning exercise. Teams that conduct regular AARs become progressively more skilled, more cohesive, and more calibrated in their behavioral assessments. Teams that skip AARs repeat the same errors indefinitely.

## **Documentation and Legal Considerations**

When a security incident occurs that involves direct engagement with a visitor — particularly if it results in a request for the person to leave, a physical intervention, or law enforcement contact — documentation is essential. Document as promptly as possible: what you observed (specific behavioral descriptions, not interpretive labels), what you said, what the subject said, what actions were taken, who was present, and what the outcome was. This documentation serves your legal protection, your organization's liability management, and your team's learning.

Detaining or physically preventing someone from leaving raises serious legal issues that vary by jurisdiction and circumstance. In general: church security teams are private citizens without the authority to detain. Physical intervention should be reserved for situations of imminent physical harm to self or others. Verbal

requests to leave are appropriate; physical prevention of departure is not, unless a credible, immediate physical threat is being actively manifested. Consult a qualified attorney about your specific state's laws regarding the rights and liabilities of private security in your context before a crisis requires you to improvise these decisions.



## PRACTICAL APPLICATION: TEAM PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT

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1. **Design your signal system:** Schedule a 60-minute team meeting dedicated to developing your non-verbal signal and code word system. Limit it to 8 signals. Practice each one until it flows naturally. Post the reference chart somewhere accessible to team members but not to the general public.
2. **OODA loop role-play:** Present your team with two or three scenario descriptions (drawn from the scenarios in this book or from your own experience). Walk through the OODA loop for each scenario as a group: what would you observe, how would you orient, what would you decide, and what action would you take? Debrief each answer.
3. **Soft intervention scripts:** Each team member writes two soft intervention scripts tailored to your specific congregation and context. Practice these in pairs until delivery feels natural. Comfort with the script is what makes it effective — awkward delivery immediately changes the dynamic.
4. **Document your escalation tiers:** As a team, write out your four escalation tiers with specific, observable criteria for each. Post them in your security team area. Review them at the beginning of each quarter. Update them based on AAR learnings.

**5. Establish the AAR habit:** Commit as a team to a five-minute AAR conversation after every service — not just incident Sundays. Ask the four questions above. Write one sentence of learning in a shared team log. After a year, review the log: you will be astonished at how much institutional wisdom has accumulated.

CHAPTER TEN

# 10

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## Compassion as Your Core Discipline

*"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear."*

— 1 John 4:18

### The Last Discipline

You have now received nine chapters of technical instruction. You have learned the science of microexpressions, the art of behavioral baseline analysis, the mechanics of zone assessment and contact-point observation, the signatures of seven universal emotions and the behavioral language of the entire body, the cluster analysis framework that makes observation meaningful rather than paranoid, the special considerations for vulnerable populations, and the team protocols that make individual skill collectively powerful.

There is one more discipline to learn. It is not a technique. It is not a framework. It is a character quality that must be actively cultivated and continuously renewed, because the work of standing at the sacred door — watching, assessing, intervening, protecting

— has a cumulative psychological cost that, if left unmanaged, will slowly corrupt the very capacities you have spent this book developing. That discipline is compassion.

## **Security and Hospitality Are Not Opposites**

The most common objection to church security programs is a theological one: "How can we be a welcoming community if we are simultaneously treating our visitors as potential threats?" The objection rests on a false dichotomy — the assumption that security and hospitality are mutually exclusive. They are not. The most welcoming communities I have encountered are also, in many cases, the most attentively cared-for ones: communities where someone notices when you arrive, when you are upset, when you are alone, when you need help. That attentiveness is precisely what behavioral observation cultivates.

A trained security team member who approaches every visitor with genuine curiosity and care — truly wanting to know who this person is and what they need — is not performing a security function at the expense of hospitality. They are doing both simultaneously. The warmth is real. The attention is focused. The care is genuine. And the congregation benefits from both the safety and the love.

The key is this: the compassion must not be performed. A greeter who smiles mechanically while mentally running through a threat checklist is failing at both tasks. The training you have received in this book is not meant to replace genuine human

connection at the door; it is meant to sharpen the quality of that connection by making you more present, more perceptive, and more responsive to what is actually in front of you.

## **The Theology of Welcoming the Stranger**

The biblical tradition is remarkably consistent on this point: the stranger at the door is not merely a security challenge but a theological opportunity. In Genesis, Abraham entertains three strangers at his tent door who turn out to be divine messengers. In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself with "the stranger" in Matthew 25: "I was a stranger and you invited me in." In Leviticus, the Israelites are commanded to love the stranger "as yourself." In Hebrews, the author writes that some who have shown hospitality to strangers have "entertained angels without knowing it."

This tradition does not require naivete. It does not demand that we discard discernment in favor of unconditional openness. Abraham examined his visitors; Jesus distinguished between those who came seeking life and those who came to steal and destroy. But it does require that the default posture toward the arriving stranger be one of welcome, dignity, and care — and that any departure from that posture be governed by behavioral evidence rather than fear, habit, or assumption.

The behavioral observer who holds this theological framework alongside their technical training is a remarkably powerful combination: they bring the precision of trained observation and the warmth of genuine pastoral regard to every interaction. They do

not see a threat to be managed; they see a human being to be welcomed, until evidence specifically and repeatedly suggests otherwise.

*"The stranger at the door is, in the biblical imagination, always a potential angel. Greet them accordingly — with your eyes open and your heart open wider."*

CHURCH SECURITY THEOLOGY

## How Fear Can Corrupt Good Observation

There is a version of church security that is driven not by love for the congregation but by fear — fear of violence, fear of liability, fear of the stranger, fear of being the person who didn't act when they should have. This fear-driven security is not merely unpleasant; it is operationally incompetent. Here is why:

Fear narrows attention. Under conditions of fear, the human brain's perceptual field contracts. We stop noticing the full behavioral picture and start looking exclusively for threat confirmations. We over-identify threat indicators in benign behavior because our fear-state is priming us to find them. We miss the authentic stranger who needs help because we're focused on the threatening stranger who may or may not exist. And we approach every interaction with a subtle charge of hostility or suspicion that communicates itself through our own microexpressions and body

language — which, in turn, elevates the anxiety of our visitors, changes their behavior, and makes our threat assessments less accurate.

The antidote to fear-driven observation is twofold: excellent technical training (which builds genuine competence and reduces the anxiety of the unknown) and active cultivation of compassion as the emotional operating mode for your security role. A trained, compassionate observer is calmer, more accurate, more effective, and more reflective of the community they protect than a fearful one. Train toward competence; cultivate toward love.

## **Serving the Hurting, the Broken, and the Dangerous with Equal Grace**

One of the most challenging aspects of the church security role is that the same door receives the deeply hurting (who need extraordinary care), the emotionally volatile (who need patient de-escalation), and the rarely but genuinely dangerous (who need firm, clear, professionally managed intervention). The security team member must hold all three possibilities and respond to what is actually present — not to what they fear may be present, not to what is easiest to respond to, but to what is.

This requires a quality of presence that is not common and is not automatic. It must be developed through regular practice, through reflection on past interactions (what did I actually see, what did I assume, what did I miss, what did I get right?), and through the cultivation of genuine empathy — the ability to look at another human being and sincerely wonder what it is like to be them, right now, arriving at this door.

The person who arrives in a broken state — homeless, addicted, grief-stricken, mentally ill, freshly released from prison, desperately lonely — is, by the standards of the tradition you serve, precisely the kind of person this institution was built for. Your job is not to protect the congregation from them. It is to protect the congregation and to ensure that this person, too, is welcomed with dignity into the community of imperfect people who have gathered to seek and offer grace.

## **Self-Care for the Security Volunteer**

The behavioral observer at the church door witnesses, over time, a great deal of human suffering. They encounter grief, crisis, mental illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and the occasional genuine threat. They carry the weight of responsibility for the safety of hundreds of people. They do this, often, as volunteers with full professional and family lives outside this role. And they do it, frequently, without the kind of debriefing, peer support, and institutional care that professional first responders have access to.

Vicarious trauma — the psychological cost of regularly being exposed to others' traumatic experiences, or of carrying ongoing responsibility for preventing harm — is real. It is not weakness to be affected by it; it is human. Symptoms include: hypervigilance that extends beyond your security role into ordinary life, difficulty "turning off" threat-scanning after you leave your post, sleep disruption related to incident imagery or worry, emotional numbing, growing cynicism about human nature, and burnout from the relentlessness of the responsibility.

If you recognize these symptoms in yourself or a team member, take them seriously. Ensure your security team has access to pastoral care for its own members. Conduct regular debriefs that include space for emotional processing, not just tactical review. Rotate team members out of high-intensity posts. Celebrate the mundane victories: the many Sundays when the observation was thorough and the congregation worshipped in peace and the stranger was welcomed and nothing happened — because that outcome is not nothing; that outcome is the whole point.

## **Building a Culture of Safety That Feels Like Love**

The ultimate measure of a church security program is not how many threats it has intercepted — though interceptions matter. It is how the congregation feels when they gather. Do they feel safe? Do they feel welcomed? Do they feel that someone is paying attention? And for the first-time visitor: do they feel received with dignity and warmth, even as that warmth is accompanied by attentive eyes?

These are not security metrics. They are community metrics. And they are only achievable when the security team has integrated its technical training with a genuine culture of care. This means: security team members who know congregation members by name. Security team members who pray for the people they protect. Security team members who are visibly part of the community — present in worship, known in the foyer, integrated in relationships — rather than uniformed strangers with earpieces stationed at the periphery.

When security feels like love — when the congregation knows that the attentive presence at the door is one of care and not of suspicion — the entire culture of the community is shaped by it. Fear recedes. Trust increases. The stranger at the door is received with both competence and grace. And the sacred threshold, that remarkable space between the outside world and something different, becomes what it was always meant to be: a doorway to hope.

*"You are not just a security team. You are the first pastoral encounter many strangers will have with this community. Make it count. Make it warm. Make it true."*

FINAL CHARGE TO CHURCH SECURITY VOLUNTEERS

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: CULTIVATING COMPASSION AS A SECURITY DISCIPLINE**

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1. **The Motive Review:** Before each shift at your security post, take three minutes to ask yourself: What is my emotional state right now? Am I bringing fear, frustration, fatigue, or prejudice to this role today? What do I need to bring instead? Set a conscious intention: "Today I will observe with curiosity and respond with care."
2. **The Story Habit:** For every person you observe who gives you a moment of concern, practice constructing the most compassionate plausible story about them alongside the most concerning one. The compassionate story is not naive; it is disciplined. "This person is showing significant distress because they just received terrible news" and "this person is concealing a threat" are both hypotheses. The discipline of holding both simultaneously is what prevents either paranoia or blindness.
3. **Team self-care check-in:** Begin every team meeting with a brief check-in: "How is everyone doing?" Not as a formality, but as a real question. Create space for team members to acknowledge when the work is weighing on them. Connect struggling team members with pastoral support proactively.

4. **The Sabbath Rest:** Security volunteers who serve every week without rotation are at high risk for burnout and perceptual fatigue. Ensure your team is large enough that no one serves more than two or three Sundays per month. The observer who is rested, refueled, and relationally grounded is measurably more effective than the one who is exhausted and running on obligation.
5. **The Gratitude Log:** At the end of each month, write three specific things for which you are grateful about your security service this month. Not things that went wrong and needed fixing, but things that went right — the person who was welcomed beautifully, the situation that was resolved through good judgment, the moment of genuine human connection at the door. Gratitude is not sentimentality; it is the neural counterweight to vicarious trauma.

## AFTERWORD

## Training Never Stops

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A book is a beginning, not an end. The skill of behavioral observation is not something that is attained and then possessed; it is something that is practiced and, through practice, continuously deepened. The practitioner who reads this book, completes the exercises, and then puts the text on the shelf and never engages with the material again will find their skill degrading within months. The practitioner who uses this book as a foundation for ongoing, structured, community-embedded practice will find their skill growing year after year.

The science of microexpression analysis continues to evolve. Paul Ekman's foundational work has been extended, refined, and occasionally challenged by subsequent researchers. The field of behavioral threat assessment has developed sophisticated organizational frameworks that go well beyond individual skill to address institutional policy, community relationships, and systemic prevention. Church security specifically has developed its own literature, professional associations, and training infrastructures over the past decade.

Staying current matters. The attacker profile, the available technologies, the legal landscape, and the research base are all changing. A professional commitment to ongoing education is not optional; it is the difference between competence and excellence.

## Organizations and Certifications

The following professional organizations and certifications are recognized in the fields of security, behavioral analysis, and church safety:

- **ASIS International** ([asis.org](http://asis.org)) — The leading global organization for security management professionals. Offers the Certified Protection Professional (CPP), Physical Security Professional (PSP), and Professional Certified Investigator (PCI) credentials.
- **The Ekman Group** ([paulekman.com](http://paulekman.com)) — Offers the Micro Expression Training Tool (METT) and related online training in facial action coding and expression recognition. The gold standard in microexpression training.
- **CISA (Congregational Security Training)** — Faith-based security training programs offered through various regional providers. Contact your state's law enforcement division or the FBI's local field office for programs available in your region.
- **The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP)** ([atapworldwide.org](http://atapworldwide.org)) — Professional association for individuals in threat assessment. Offers education, research, and the Certified Threat Manager (CTM) credential.
- **The FBI's Active Shooter Prevention resources** — Available at [fbi.gov](http://fbi.gov) and through local field office outreach programs. Free, evidence-based, regularly updated.

- **The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center** ([alerrt.org](http://alerrt.org)) — Offers civilian training programs including Stop the Bleed and active threat response training appropriate for church security volunteers.

Whatever your level of security experience, there is a training program available to you that will meaningfully advance your competence. Invest in it. The congregation you protect is worth it. And so are you.

## REFERENCE

# Glossary

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**Adaptor**

A self-directed gesture or movement performed to manage internal discomfort or arousal, such as touching one's face, adjusting clothing, or rubbing one's hands. Adaptors increase in frequency and intensity as emotional stress increases and are a reliable indicator of elevated anxiety.

**Amygdala**

An almond-shaped structure in the medial temporal lobe of the brain that functions as the primary threat-detection and emotional-response center. The amygdala processes incoming sensory information for emotional significance before conscious evaluation occurs, producing the involuntary emotional and physiological responses that include microexpressions.

**Autonomic Nervous System Response**

The involuntary physiological response to emotional stimuli, mediated by the sympathetic ("fight-or-flight") and parasympathetic ("rest-and-digest") branches of the autonomic nervous system. Under emotional arousal, ANS responses include increased heart rate, altered respiration, muscle tension, perspiration, and facial muscle contractions that produce microexpressions.

**Baseline**

The established range of behaviors that are typical, expected, and contextually appropriate for a specific individual, group, or setting. Behavioral security assessment depends on accurately establishing baseline and identifying meaningful deviations from it. Baseline is individual, cultural, and contextual — never universal.

**Behavioral Profiling**

Assessment methodology based on observable behaviors rather than demographic characteristics. When properly applied, behavioral profiling evaluates what a person is doing — how they move, how they communicate, how their behavior deviates from baseline — rather than what they look like or where they are from. Distinguished from demographic profiling, which is both operationally ineffective and ethically impermissible.

**Cluster**

A group of three or more congruent behavioral signals that independently point toward the same interpretive conclusion. The cluster principle holds that no single behavioral signal should be treated as meaningful in isolation; requiring multiple congruent signals before elevating an assessment dramatically reduces false positives while maintaining sensitivity to genuine threats.

**Cognitive Load**

The mental effort demanded of a person by a particular cognitive task. Individuals managing active deception, rehearsing cover stories, or suppressing strong emotional states are under high cognitive load, which produces detectable behavioral artifacts including reduced spontaneity, decreased illustrator frequency, increased adaptor behavior, and delayed response to questions.

**Congruence**

The alignment between what a person says (verbal channel) and what their body and face are simultaneously communicating (nonverbal channels). High congruence accompanies truthful, emotionally engaged communication. Incongruence — where verbal content diverges from nonverbal signals — is a significant behavioral indicator of active management or concealment.

**Contempt**

One of the seven universal emotions, characterized by a sense of superiority and disdain toward another. Its facial signature is unique among universal expressions: a unilateral (one-sided) lip corner raise on one side of the face only. Contempt is operationally significant because it is associated with ideologically motivated hostility and has been consistently found in pre-attack behavioral research as a precursor to cold, goal-directed aggression.

**De-escalation**

A set of communication strategies and behavioral approaches designed to reduce the emotional intensity and potential volatility of an interaction or situation. Effective de-escalation involves calm body language, measured tone, validation of the other person's experience, and patient, non-threatening communication that creates space for voluntary compliance rather than enforced control.

**Deception Cues**

Behavioral signals associated with active deception, including verbal-nonverbal incongruence, delayed speech onset, reduced illustrator frequency, increased adaptor behavior, and specific emotional microexpressions (such as suppressed surprise or fear). Deception cues indicate elevated cognitive load and emotional suppression, but do not constitute proof of deception — they require cluster analysis and contextual interpretation.

**Display Rules**

Culturally learned norms that govern which emotions may be expressed, at what intensity, and in what social contexts. Display rules vary significantly across cultures and explain why the same underlying emotional state may produce very different observable expressions in people from different cultural backgrounds, even though the underlying microexpressions of the seven universal emotions remain consistent.

**Duchenne Smile**

Named after neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne, a genuine smile that activates both the zygomaticus major (raising lip corners) and the orbicularis oculi (compressing lower eyelids, raising cheeks, and producing crow's feet). The orbicularis oculi is notoriously resistant to voluntary control, making the Duchenne smile the most reliable indicator of genuine positive emotion. Its absence in otherwise smile-shaped expressions is itself a behavioral signal.

**Emblem**

A culturally specific, voluntarily performed gesture with a defined meaning (thumbs-up, wave, pointing finger). Emblems are significant in security observation primarily when they appear as "partial emblems" — an emblem initiated and then suppressed — which reveals an unintentional "slipped" behavioral communication.

**Emotional Leakage**

The unintended revelation of a suppressed or concealed emotional state through involuntary behavioral channels — particularly facial microexpressions, self-soothing behaviors, and voice quality changes. Emotional leakage is the mechanism that makes microexpression-based behavioral observation possible: the body communicates the emotional truth even when the verbal presentation is managed.

**Freeze Response**

The first phase of the autonomic nervous system's threat response: sudden, complete inhibition of movement in response to a perceived threat. In security contexts, brief freeze responses occur normally and are unremarkable; extended or repeatedly triggered freeze responses — particularly in response to specific stimuli (such as the appearance of security personnel) — may indicate a threat-detection response worth noting.

**Hot Spot**

A specific moment within an interaction at which an individual's behavior changes significantly from their pattern within that conversation. Hot spots reveal where emotional or cognitive pressure is concentrated and indicate that a specific word, question, name, or stimulus has triggered a meaningful response that warrants follow-up investigation through gentle probing.

**Illustrator**

A hand or arm movement that accompanies and literally illustrates speech, such as gestures indicating size, direction, or sequence. Illustrator frequency is a useful behavioral metric: it decreases when a person is under cognitive load or actively managing their speech, making reduced illustrator behavior a potential indicator of elevated stress or deception.

**JDLR ("Just Doesn't Look Right")**

A colloquial term used by security professionals for the pre-analytical intuitive alarm generated by the brain's pattern-recognition system when it detects a behavioral incongruence before conscious analysis has identified the specific components. JDLR is not mystical; it is the rapid pattern-matching output of trained perception. When experienced, it is a prompt to engage analytical observation, not a basis for immediate action.

**Macroexpression**

A full-duration facial expression lasting from approximately half a second to four or more seconds, representing the normal range of visible emotional expression in social interaction. Macroexpressions are the most readily observable form of facial expression and require less training to identify than microexpressions or subtle expressions.

**Microexpression**

An involuntary facial expression lasting between 1/25th and 1/5th of a second (40–200 milliseconds) that reveals a suppressed or concealed emotional state. Microexpressions are produced by the subcortical emotional system before conscious suppression mechanisms can engage; they are complete, symmetrical (except for contempt) expressions that are invisible to untrained observers but detectable by those who have received appropriate training.

### **OODA Loop**

Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — a decision-making framework developed by military strategist John Boyd and widely adopted in security and law enforcement. Applied to church security, it structures the observer's response to behavioral signals: gather raw data (Observe), interpret it against baseline and context (Orient), select an appropriately scaled response (Decide), and execute while immediately returning to Observe.

### **Pacifying Gesture**

Any self-directed behavior that reduces the neurological stress response, including neck touching, face touching, hair manipulation, wrist grabbing, and rhythmic self-rubbing. Pacifying gestures are triggered by the limbic system's stress response and are largely involuntary, making them reliable real-time indicators of elevated anxiety or discomfort.

### **Paralanguage**

The non-verbal elements of speech, including pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm, pausing, and disfluency. Paralinguistic signals provide behavioral information parallel to facial and body language: elevated pitch indicates arousal, unusually slow tempo may indicate cognitive load, and response latency (pause before answering) may indicate that an answer is being constructed rather than recalled.

**Pre-Attack Indicator**

A behavioral signal or pattern associated, in combination with other indicators, with elevated risk of targeted violence. Common pre-attack indicators include surveillance behavior, target glancing, weather-inappropriate clothing, behavioral incongruence, and specific emotional expression patterns (particularly suppressed anger and contempt). No single pre-attack indicator is diagnostic in isolation; cluster analysis is essential.

**Proxemics**

The study of personal space and its management in social interaction, developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall identified four primary distance zones (intimate, personal, social, and public) whose management varies by culture. Violations of culturally expected personal space boundaries — in either direction — are behavioral signals worthy of contextual interpretation.

**Subtle Expression**

A low-intensity facial expression in which not all the muscles involved in a given emotion are fully activated, producing a partial or dampened version of the full expression. Subtle expressions occur when an emotion is felt at mild intensity or when suppression is very effective. They last normal durations but carry a weaker signal that requires careful training to detect reliably.

**Target Glancing**

A pre-attack behavioral pattern characterized by brief, intense, and repeatedly returning glances at a specific individual or location. Target glancing differs from normal environmental scanning in its specificity and repetition: the gaze returns compulsively to the same target rather than moving fluidly across the environment. Identified in research on mass casualty event perpetrators.

**Threat Assessment**

A structured, evidence-based process for evaluating the risk that a specific individual poses to a specific target. Distinguished from profiling (which categorizes types of people) by its focus on specific behaviors, communications, and circumstances of identified individuals. Professional threat assessment is conducted by trained multidisciplinary teams and integrates behavioral, psychological, situational, and relational data.

**Vicarious Trauma**

Psychological harm accumulated through regular exposure to others' traumatic experiences or through carrying ongoing responsibility for preventing harm. Common in security professionals, first responders, pastoral workers, and social service providers. Symptoms include hypervigilance, emotional numbing, sleep disruption, and burnout. Prevention requires regular debriefing, peer support, personal care practices, and realistic rotation of high-intensity duties.

## REFERENCE

## Further Reading & Resources

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### Books

Ekman, Paul. *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. 2nd ed. Holt Paperbacks, 2007. The definitive accessible introduction to microexpression research from its founding scholar.

Ekman, Paul. *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage*. W. W. Norton, 2009. Ekman's treatment of deception behavior, emotional leakage, and the limits of deception detection.

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de Becker, Gavin. *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence*. Little, Brown and Company, 1997. A landmark treatment of intuition, pattern recognition, and the science of threat assessment. Essential reading for anyone in a protective role.

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Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. Little, Brown and Company, 2005. An accessible treatment of rapid cognition and pattern recognition, useful for understanding the JDLR phenomenon and the limits of intuitive judgment.

## Research and Professional Resources

Ekman, Paul. "Facial Action Coding System (FACS)." [paulekman.com](http://paulekman.com). The foundational coding system for facial muscle movements. Training tools (METT, SETT, FACS) available for purchase at the same site.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks*. U.S. Department of Justice, 2017. Available at [fbi.gov](http://fbi.gov). Evidence-based guidance on behavioral threat assessment from the nation's primary research organization on targeted violence.

Association of Threat Assessment Professionals. *Risk Assessment Guideline Elements for Violence (RAGE-V)*. ATAP, 2006. Professional-grade guidance for structured threat assessment, available to ATAP members.

Calhoun, Frederick, and Stephen Weston. *Threat Assessment and Management Strategies: Identifying the Howlers and Hunters*. CRC Press, 2009. A practitioner's guide to distinguishing disturbing individuals from genuinely dangerous ones.

Langman, Peter. *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Important research on the psychology and behavioral pathway of targeted violence perpetrators, applicable to

understanding the broader threat profile.

## **Online Resources**

Paul Ekman Group ([paulekman.com](http://paulekman.com)) — Microexpression training tools, research summaries, and professional consultation resources.

ASIS International ([asisonline.org](http://asisonline.org)) — Professional standards, research, and credentialing for security management professionals.

FBI Safe Online Surfing / Active Shooter Resources ([fbi.gov](http://fbi.gov)) — Free, regularly updated resources on active shooter prevention, behavioral threat assessment, and community safety.

ALERT Center ([alertrt.org](http://alertrt.org)) — Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training resources, including civilian response training.