

## Reassure and Protect: Best Practices in the Context of Social Tensions

*This leaflet summarizes good practices that can guide actions to mitigate tensions as well as reassure and protect targeted communities.*

In Quebec, as elsewhere in the world, social polarization is on the rise as a result of the economic, ecological, and identity-related issues associated with globalization. This is particularly evident in political (national and international) and social issues (language, gender, immigration, religion).

Polarization can lead to necessary social transformations. It can also result in an undermining of civilized and respectful exchanges between groups and individuals, as well as in incidents and hate crimes including physical violence in the most extreme cases. Faced with this situation, which causes legitimate concern to individuals, target groups, and the institutions affected by these tensions, **what are the best ways of preserving everyone's physical safety and sense of security?**

### Mitigating and Preventing Violence

#### What works:



1- Ongoing cultivation of a **warm, inclusive climate** of connection. This requires a respectful expression of differences and a focus on the things that bring people together (common objectives or missions, e.g., learning, teaching, caring, developing knowledge, etc.). Indeed, we can disagree on certain points, but still work together to achieve our common goals.

2- Establishing **continuous dialogue** before (if foreseeable), during, and after tensions. This includes leaders of the affected stakeholder groups who must be an integral part of the solution process, avoiding partisan positions. Public appearances should be made only after getting approval from all parties involved and should be shared as much as possible to increase the reach and support of the message.

3 - When faced with demands or disagreements that manifest as public demonstrations or protests, it is advised to avoid counter-demonstrations as they can often escalate. Instead, it is recommended to **engage** with the **organizers** of the demonstration beforehand and encourage them to take **responsibility for maintaining order and respect** during the protest.

#### To be avoided as it has no proven effectiveness and may aggravate the situation:



1- Installing security systems such as metal detectors and armed guards. Although these devices may reassure in the short term, they not only increase feelings of insecurity but often **inflame tensions** and lead to **more anger**. They do not reduce crime but rather cause hate incidents and other unpleasant situations, e.g., through over-intense or profiling-based actions.

2- Systematic detection of at-risk individuals. Given the absence of reliable detection tools, detection often leads to **false positives** and is usually accompanied by **profiling**, which contributes to discrimination or racism among targeted communities.

3 - Banning certain subjects or demonstrations. This is usually associated with **heightened feelings of injustice** and bias, and is seen as censorship in environments that advocate freedom of expression and academic liberty. The introduction of negotiated guidelines, where everyone is accountable for the living and working climate, is more likely to limit conflicts and resolve them internally.

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### Intervene

- During times of crisis, it is important to provide additional **support to vulnerable individuals** who may be more affected and destabilized by the climate of conflict. Hate crimes and incidents must not be tolerated and should be reported to the appropriate authorities, such as the police for crimes or the police respectively the institution for hate incidents.
- In case of an incident, beyond a firm reminder of the rules of respect and an awareness of the impact of the actions or comments reported, it is advisable to **assess** the extent to which a **person would benefit from help** to avoid a repetition of the situation. This support can be provided by the institution or external services (see below). Instead of suspension, expulsion, or criminalization, which may increase the risk of future aggression, it is better to encourage pro-social behavior and civic engagement.
- When eviction is unavoidable, it is essential to **consider a safety net** that promotes rehabilitation and rebuilding connections with a supportive environment. Even if the suggested intervention is not accepted, it shows a compassionate willingness to help and lowers the potential risks involved.

**Remember, understanding is not justifying!**

### Resources

#### **Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) – Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents:**

<https://spvm.qc.ca/en/Pages/Report-an-event/Hate-crimes-and-hate-incidents>

#### **Clinical Polarization Team – the team can be reached at 514-267-3979, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week:**

<https://www.ciussswestcentral.ca/programs-and-services/critical-incidents-and-crises/polarization-clinic/?fbclid=IwAR2VJlx7k-HWG1nNpQRBTa9tam4YaQPfKtyH50tkO4CWkcDVKjqWx4zfx7w>

#### **Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRMV) – Support Services:**

<https://info-radical.org/en/support/services/>