

# PRIDE Community Safety Planning Guide

*“Henry James said, “ Live, live all you can. It’s a mistake not to.”  
And Shakespeare said—  
and this is what I take to be the truth about everybody’s life all of the time—  
“Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.”  
Art is here to prove, and to help one bear, the fact that all safety is an illusion.  
In this sense, all artists are divorced from and even necessarily opposed  
to any system whatever.”*

- James Bladwin “The Struggle of the Artist”

We start with this quote from the incomparable queer sibling, artist, and writer James Baldwin for several reasons. **The first is we want to honor the fact that for many of us in this community the current circumstances are nothing new.** Many of us are unfortunately used to being unable to rely on the systems of these United States to guarantee their safety as an oppressed person. Or even worse, when those same systems are turned against an oppressed community with their full administrative, legislative, and judicial powers.

**Second, James is putting his finger on the heart of the issue: safety.** What is safety? Can one ever say they are truly safe? James answers with a firm no, but allows this frightening conclusion to be delivered by Henry James and Shakespeare.

**The final reason is because James' conclusion, made in the fall of 1962 in NYC, is the conclusion we must come to in 2025** as LGBTQIA+ peoples, activists, organizers, collaborators, neighbors, clergy, their communities of faith, and found family: **All safety is an illusion.**

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**Reconciling Works, working with rev. lenny duncan (they/them), have created what we are calling a “Community Safety Guide” for PRIDE '25 because we anticipate increased anti-trans, anti-queer, and anti-black and brown violence at PRIDE gatherings around the country.**

**With divisive political rhetoric targeting trans and queer people and often weaponizing transphobia in particular, our concerns have crystallized around three key community vulnerabilities in particular.**

1. So-called “lone wolf” style attacks;
2. Organized so-called “counter protests;” and,
3. A seeming lack of clear and sound guidance of what increased visibility in the public square in these times and spaces means, and more importantly, what LGBTQIA+ affirming faith communities, non-profit partners, and collaborators in the fight for liberation should do in response.

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## **Why start a community safety guide by pointing out that all safety is an illusion?**

- Because community safety is an art, not a science. There are no guarantees when any of us stand in spaces that are disputed, stand with those being silenced, or pushback against heteronormativity and its parent white supremacy. We are all at risk in this country, until the day we aren't, and PRIDE has become a temporal autonomous zone and protest again. While we recognize in many ways that this is a recapturing of the original spirit of the event (a reaction to state, police, and criminal elements that abused, victimized, and brutalized LGBTQIA+ peoples with impunity), we also recognize that this is scary for many in the community.
- Because it means you may be participating in an event where you can't rely upon the systems normally in place that makes one feel safe.

## **Our message is simple: We keep each other safe.**

**Community is our shield:** Get to know your town, your local PRIDE committee, your neighbors. Tour the proposed route in the weeks and months in advance and talk to shop owners. Get to know the houseless neighbors along the way who will have their whole week disrupted. See how the local officials police the area when the public aren't around. Learn the context.



**Our first recommendation is not to rely solely on law enforcement officials and officers (LEO's) for your community's safety.** Nor should you rely on LEO's to provide safety for any trans peoples in your community. LEO's are citizens, with political, social, and inherent biases. They are never going to be as invested as you are in your own people.

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**Our second recommendation is that you fill the suggested Community Safety Roles and use the “day-of” cards during the PRIDE events (download and laminate in advance).** The suggested Community Safety Roles are drawn from the vast experience and sacrifice of trans and queer comrades who have been frontline activists over the last decade. These roles may be familiar to those in your community who protest. They are brought to us by rev. Lenny Duncan who credits their comrades from *Justice For Patrick Kimmons* in Portland for this shared learning, for whom they were the chaplain from 2020-2023. In particular they wanted to mention this safety guide is written while holding the memory of June “T-Rex” Knightly, who gave her life in defense of black community at Normandale Park in Portland, Oregon, three years ago.

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**And, our third recommendation is this: believe us.** ReconcilingWorks has built a 50-year relationship with you that we consider to be our most precious resource. We do not use that social capital lightly. We are not being alarmist, but suggesting you take common sense precautions that activists, leaders, and organizers have been taking for the last almost decade, because this is who we are. We are your trusted partners in LGBTQIA+ liberation when your institutions don't know how to walk alongside you. Our continued commitment to that shoulder-to-shoulder walk, and most importantly, the work of LGBTQIA+ liberation, will ensure we lay the groundwork to be around another 50 years. This is our calling – even in these times when our advocacy, work, and struggle seem hopeless.

**ReconcilingWorks is here to remind you, our partner communities, organizations, and the world PRIDE community, that we are the living embodiment of hope for many peoples as the LGBTQIA+ community and its public advocates and collaborates. PRIDE is incredibly important, and this letter is to encourage those of you of good conscience and heart that there is a way forward.** We have seen it play out across the country. Maybe you chose to not participate in the black movement work in the last decade, but we give thanks for those who have. This guide will be relying heavily on the experience of our trans and queer elders, in particular those black elders from the movement for black lives as the most experienced organizers and as our “North Star” for creating this Community Safety Guide.

## **Suggested Community Safety Roles:**

1. Community Defense Team (most controversial role)
2. **De-Escalation Team**
3. **Motorcade Team**
4. **Community Counselor/Chaplain Team**
5. **Street Medic/Community EMT;**  
**or bare minimum a “Stop the Bleed” trained team of 2 volunteers**
6. Team Logistics (most complicated role to fill)

Filling these roles would be a minimum team of seven to nine volunteers for every float, group, or organization. We know this is a heavy lift on top of what your normal volunteer ask is. We

also understand that political, legal, logistical, religious, or moral reasoning or convictions may drive some of you to skip some of these roles. **Therefore, we highlighted in bold the roles we believe are in good conscience; a community's bare minimum safety team goals.** Also, in the explanation below you will find we started with the most controversial role first (1: Community Defense) and ended with the most complicated role to fill (6: Team Logistics).

## 1. Community Defense (most controversial role)

**We want to start by saying Community Defense does not mean harming other people.** We remind you of our first recommendation earlier in this letter. Anyone who has a punitive, force-driven mindset is not suited for this role. It also means you don't dismiss out of countenance any federally, state, or local legal means of self-defense. For some communities, this could mean availing themselves of their 2nd amendment rights; some to even "open-carry." While ReconcilingWorks is a committed group of peace-makers, the art of waging peace is not a passive one. While these voices who often speak of defending our own communities are often silenced or treated as extreme, there is wisdom in these times of hearing these voices out when appropriate and legal. This, of course, is every community's own path to walk with their own conscience, leaders, and community discussion.

**A Community Defense Team does not require armed or overt displays of force to create "safety;" although that can help with the illusion, it often isn't what a defense team is called to do.** We suggest two individuals be dressed in clothing that will help them in a scuffle, or to intervene in a fight after a de-escalation team member signals for them, or to step in the way of someone who approaches someone in your group while marching. This could be as simple as a light motorcycle jacket with padding, boots, jeans, and gloves. It could be some sort of ballistics or edge weapon protective gear for both of these volunteers. You want your Community Defense Team to have a couple of radios (with at least a few miles sight-to-sight range) and ear pieces. They should always, unless needed, escort on either side of the bulk of your group nearest the sidewalks. They are to leave this escort position only to step in, break up, and thwart any violence – never to respond in kind; only to protect others. This requires quite simply courageous members of your community and experienced ones (if available) as well. This role requires discipline and a commitment to always act in ways that minimize violence, even if they must use it in self-defense. ReconcilingWorks reminds you that courage is being afraid and simply showing up and doing it anyway.

## 2. De-escalation Team

**The De-escalation Team is made up of two volunteers who are trained in, or have experience in, de-escalation.** ReconcilingWorks knows that this term can mean many different things to different people. What we mean here is individuals who know how to approach angry, possibly violent, and dangerous-seeming threatening citizens to de-escalate encounters that may turn violent. Or individuals who can step in between our own people and people in hate groups who often have a *lawful permit* to spew rhetoric

and express their First Amendment rights in the worst way possible. Often it isn't even *organized* hate that a de-escalation team will intervene in, but rather citizens caught up in the political zeitgeist who have unplanned encounters with a PRIDE celebration. A common example is someone threatening to drive their car through a smaller parade route because they have been "inconvenienced." (Your **Motorcade team should** have already alerted you in this situation or at least be standing in the intersection before your group crosses.) A de-escalation team knows in that situation this person is trying to *build up to violence*, and also knows it isn't their job to change that person's heart or to win an argument; it is to be a non-anxious presence long enough for your group to pass the danger, to leave an impression that you are real people – not walking political rhetoric – and that the consequences are real. Rev. Lenny suggests something as simple as saying: *"I hear you friend, but is any of this really worth maybe prison or seriously getting hurt? Or someone's kid? My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I bet you have someone who would miss you if something terrible happened in a moment of anger."*

Remember, non-violent communication is key. **People just want to be heard, and you just need to listen long enough for your group to move on.** This team should also have one member with a radio and earpiece to stay in communication with the team, and one member without that does the initial approach. Note: if you choose to have a Community Defense Team, one of the team should stay near (but away from) the encounter until the de-escalator moves on.

### 3. Motorcade Team

The Motorcade Team should be two volunteers on bikes, electric bikes, electric skateboards, or scooter; bikes are preferable. The Motorcade volunteers simply stay ahead of the group until they reach the next intersection or turn on the parade route. They park their bikes or vehicles in the center of each intersection before your group crosses. After the group crosses, they go ahead and repeat the process. They should have radios and be in communication with the rest of the teams. If LEO's are handling the parade pace, rhythm, and intersection crossings, your group should wait until the **Motorcade Team also** signals to cross. Remember the authorities will often do a lot of yelling. Assign two people who will be at the head of your group who will marshal your group across intersections after the **Motorcade Team** gives the "all clear."

### 4. Community Counselor/Chaplain

Not all violence is physical. We hope no one will encounter any, but more than likely it will be emotional, moral, and rhetorical anti-queer and anti-trans violence. Many of your people will encounter hatred in incredibly visceral ways, and the body keeps the score. In other words – people in your group may experience trauma. We suggest you assign a counselor, therapist, or faith leader solely to this role this year; they should do nothing else for the entire event. **Even on a PRIDE day where everything goes perfectly, full of LGBTQIA+ joy and visibility, there is an emotional cost to being visible.** We ask that you use a "community first" modality to your engagement with PRIDE this year; that

means people, their real feelings, and the real impact this all is having on them must be the first priority. We can only win by healing our deep wounds within ourselves and walk alongside those who are experiencing pain. This role should be a high priority this year.

**5. Street Medic/Community EMT;  
or bare minimum a “Stop the Bleed”-trained team of 2 volunteers**

These are additional volunteers at the event, not just someone checking to make sure your local municipality assigned EMT's or that your PRIDE committee has hired EMT's to be along the route. (Furthermore, someone in the group carrying care and first aid items is a bare minimum that is no longer enough. That isn't a medic; that is an access issue needing to be addressed. If you aren't carrying at least aspirin, some hydration supplies, and a few basic items how would elder or disabled LGBTQIA+ siblings participate?)

What you need is a trained EMT, Paramedic, or experienced street Medic. If you don't know the difference (or the volunteer can't explain the difference between those to you), talk with a nurse or doctor your group might know. If you can't find a volunteer who has these “Bonafide's” then find a local “Stop the Bleed” training and learn how to treat a GSW (gunshot wound) in the first moments. See the suggested supply list for a medic kit on the medic supplies card.

**6. Team Logistics (most complicated role to fill)**

The Team Logistics role should be filled by an experienced organizer who has done direct action and who moves all these teams around and guides you through tough situations. This person – if put in place – must be the one to guide each group through any situation they encounter “day of” and should be listened to as the community's authority or lead. We suggest an experienced organizer because you want a person who will use your most precious resource, your people, sparingly. It's always a good strategy to have one person watching the whole action, march, or parade. We also know that not having any named leadership is a political commitment of many people, so we make this an optional role.

For those of you in communities, institutions, or organizations with no relationship with anyone with the experience to guide you through times or situations like this currently and locally, perhaps just use this section to ask yourself why?

*Written in sincere hope of LGBTQIA+ liberation,  
ReconcilingWorks*

