

Let's Show Civil Courage

Foreword

The subject of right-wing extremism has not just been dealt with high priority in North Rhine-Westphalia after the troubles of this past summer. Xenophobic and racist violent criminals attack the foundation of our constitution- in particular the basic right of human dignity. They endanger peaceful co-existence and the image of Germany as an open and friendly country.

In an extensive programme against right-wing extremism, the state government has decided amongst other things to support a social climate characterised by tolerance and civil courage. This brochure should serve as a direction for each individual. Because who asks for civil courage must give practical aid.

Dr. Fritz Behrens
Interior Minister
North Rhine-Westphalia

What everyone can do everyday against violence and racism:

Violence and racist attacks can take place daily at school, at work, on the street, on the train, in the pub etc. Many people react hesitantly and look away or ignore the situation. They hardly realise that such a reaction actually supports and strengthens the climate of violence.

Experience in dealing with violence and racism has shown how violent criminals and racists can be checked. It has also shown what each of us can do to ensure that violence and racism do not erupt. It is always important to inform the Police Emergency Service (Tel.: 110) and to report the crime to your local police station.

Some basic ideas:

There are no proper recipes, tips or rules of conduct.

Always be aware of your personal abilities and do not play the hero. Each situation is different and depends on the assailant, victim, other participants and, of course, location.

Do not use any defensive weapons or devices such as a knife. Experience to date has shown that the signals you emit by that strengthens the anger and violence of the attacker and can give the appearance of legitimising the assailant. Furthermore, you can never be sure that your own weapon will not be suddenly used against you. As an alternative, there are signal devices such as shrill whistles or small alarms: these allow you to draw attention and to scare the aggressor for a moment.

Attackers will often be put off by your actions out of fear of being recognised.

What you can do!

In the train, in the bus:

When someone is attacked, insulted or injured in the train, bus or other public transport, other passengers are often shocked or afraid and do not quite know how to react. You can do the following:

Order/Ask the driver to call the police. They are required to do so. Otherwise they can be charged with refusal to offer assistance.

If you cannot reach the driver directly, call out to those sitting at the front and tell them, the driver should inform the police.

You can challenge other passengers to whistle and to call out "Stop it! Stop it!" At first, few will participate but then more will join in. Now the situation has become risky for the attacker because it is now complicated and unpredictable. They are put off by the risk and will probably try to flee the scene.

Depending upon the situation, you may even ask the driver to lock the doors so that the attacker cannot flee until the police arrives.

It is important to speak to as many passengers as possible and draw them into the scene- this has a stronger effect against the assailant.

In the pub:

You notice how several people rail against other guests, insult them or attack them. Or they begin making racist comments or jokes. When someone tries to reason with them, they may possibly attempt to show who is in control in the pub by screaming "Heil Hitler!" They may even become violent and abusive towards those guests they believe to be foreigners.

Get help! Ask other guests to stand up together with several more. If you are in sufficient numbers, separate or encircle the rowdies and demand united that they stop.

Go to the barkeeper or to other guests who may have mobile telephones and ask them to call the police. The barkeeper is required to hinder criminal activity in his/her public house. If he or she tolerates this type of activity, it could cost them their business license.

You can call the police yourself and wait for them outside. There you can calmly explain to the police what has happened.

In the pedestrian precinct:

Do not let yourself be provoked in violent or racist situations. Violence often occurs when loud verbal exchanges escalate.

Do not speak with the assailant in a familiar manner, for example, using the German word "Du" when addressing the assailant. Passers-by could easily confuse the situation for a private conflict.

Take over the situation; speak with others present directly and personally:

"Hello! You in the green coat, please help me and call the police immediately!" If this passer-by reacts, then the situation has taken a turn and a snowball effect can develop whereby you can involve other passers-by.

Now the situation will become difficult for the rowdies. They will be surprised, because up till now they have had the experience that others have ignored the situation or were scared.

! Important: A charge, police investigation and court case will result in unpleasantness and additional difficulties for the attackers. Assailants must know that they will be held accountable for their actions. The police are available 24 hours a day and they will respond quickly when you dial the emergency number 110.

In a scuffle:

If children, youths or adults have physical arguments, sound the alarm, make a noise, draw attention towards them (from a safe distance). Draw the attention of others towards the brawl and send them to get help or to call the police. Attackers are afraid of being recognised and held accountable. Speak directly to the assailant (by name if you have overheard it) or draw attention to their recognisable characteristics: "You with the bald head, we know you, stop it...we have already called the police..."

Many children and youth claim, when pressed, that "we were just having fun". They are quickly put into their place when you speak of the violence which just occurred in specific terms: "Then let us see the arm, the red marks (the bloody lip, the black eye, the torn trousers etc.), you call that fun? I call that physical injury..." (then you are on the offensive).

In public:

React when you witness racist insults and humiliating jokes. Contradict them loudly and clearly. Do not allow discussions concerning foreigners or refugees to become heated.

Remind them that people leave their homes only because they are forced to and the reasons for seeking asylum are complex.

Let immigrant families or refugees speak and create opportunities for them and Germans to meet and understand one another.

Speak out against racist activities and discriminating reporting in newspapers through letters-to-the-editor. In such letters, call for peaceful co-existence in society.

Demand that your representatives in Parliament clearly speak out against violence and racism. Politicians should set an example.

Contact the media if they utilise speech or pictures that promote or create discrimination or minimise the problems.

Do not simply ignore the fears and problems that people near you have with "foreigners". Approach the fears and problems directly and attempt to diffuse them with specific arguments. Someone with fear, worries or problems does not necessarily act like a racist.

Report to the police or contact anti-discrimination offices if you notice that right-wing extremist songs, computer games, magazines, propaganda etc. are circulating in your area. Notify the responsible parties and the politicians of your city concerning your observations.

If you are threatened or attacked:

Be prepared!

Prepare yourself mentally for threatening situations. Create scenarios for yourself and with others. You ought to make it clear to yourself to what extent you can expose yourself to personal risk. It is better to immediately inform the police (Tel.: 110) and to get help than to make no decision and do nothing.

Stay calm!

Avoid panic and hectic and avoid sudden movements that could provoke a reflex reaction. Those who are calm within themselves are more creative in action and will have a calming effect on others involved.

Be active!

It is important not to be paralysed by fear. Small actions are better than considering great heroics. If you witness violence, show that you are prepared to act in accordance with your possibilities. A single step, a short statement, each action changes the situation and can bring others in on your side.

Abandon the role of the victim!

If you are attacked, do not run and do not act submissive. Be clear in your head as to your priorities and clearly show what you want. Seize the initiative and place your imprint on the situation: write your own script!

Keep contact with the attacker!

Make eye contact and attempt to establish or maintain communication.

Talk and listen!

Impart the obvious; speak calmly, loudly and clearly. Listen to what the assailant says. Determine your next step from his/her answer.

Do not threaten or insult!

Make no contemptuous comments about the attacker. Do not attempt to intimidate, threaten or strike fear into the assailant. Criticise the behaviour but do not devalue the person (*Be clear in speech and moderate in tone*).

Get help!

Do not speak to an anonymous mass, but rather to individual persons. This applies equally to victims and spectators. They are prepared to help as long as someone else takes the first step or speaks to them directly.

Do the unexpected!

Be creative and use the surprise effect to your advantage.

Avoid bodily contact!

When you come to someone's aid, avoid making bodily contact with the attacker unless you are in superior numbers and can hold someone tight to calm him down. As a rule, bodily contact is crossing the line that can lead to escalated violence. If necessary, make contact with the victim instead.

Active non-violent behaviour can be learned!

In coming to terms with our fears and the limits of our actions, we learn about what lies in the area between boundaries. We often underestimate the extent of our possibilities. In role-playing and concrete training in dealing with direct violence, one can discover new and creative solutions to conflict situations.

Violence and Racism De-escalation Training* offers the opportunity for trying, training and testing conducts of behaviour to which many may not be accustomed.

At the kindergarten and at school:

You can ask teachers how they employ information and what they do to combat violence and racism. This also applies to parents' councils, class guardians, school conferences and pupil representatives.

At work:

Discuss with your colleagues whether and when they could help in spreading information. You can help implement company policies against discrimination or use the company newspaper to inform about people from immigrant or refugee families. You can support and report about solidarity programmes.

* De-escalation Training is offered, for example, by "SOS- Rassismus-NRW". An extensive information and trainer directory can be ordered from here. Also available here is information material concerning the project *Schools without Racism*.

Issued by: Interior Ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia
Constitutional Protection Section
P.O. Box 10 30 13
40021 Düsseldorf, Germany
Harald Strasse 5
40213 Düsseldorf, Germany
Tel.: +49 – (0)211 – 871 2821
Fax: +49 – (0)211 – 871 2928
eMail: info@mail.verfassungsschutz.nrw.de
Internet: <http://www.verfassungsschutz.nrw.de>

The Interior Ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia would like to extend its thanks to SOS-Rassismus-NRW for support, advice and the use of texts for the production of this pamphlet.

SOS-Rassismus-NRW

Villigster De-escalation Team Against Violence and Racism
c/o Amt für Jugendarbeit der EKvW
Haus Villigst, 58239 Schwerte
Tel.: +49 – (0)2304 – 755 190 Fax: +49 – (0)2304 – 755 248
eMail: g.kirchhoff@ae