CHAPTER 8

Security & Self-Defense

New here? Ready, Set, Ready is a 10-minute starting point: an honest assessment, one gap closed for real, then a map for using the rest of this site. Once something's actually happened, Surviving picks up where this chapter leaves off, organized by chronology instead of category. Curious how Tier, Stage, and Phase relate? See the Glossary.

Why This Category Comes Sixth

Security & Self-Defense is about keeping people out who intend harm, and about knowing how to actually defend yourself and your household if it comes to that. An actual home-defense scenario is comparatively rare next to this manual's companion chapter, Shelter & Structural Safety, where a structural failure is a near-certainty in a major seismic event; this chapter is written in that proportion, serious but not treated as the dominant daily concern.

As with the prior chapters, each tier adds capability rather than replacing it: Tier 1's basic entry deterrence stays relevant even after Tier 3 adds a defensible perimeter. And one point matters enough to state up front, before anything else in this chapter: owning a firearm is not the same skill as being proficient with one. If you intend to use one for defense, you need to train to proficiency, and that is not something a book can, or will, attempt to provide. Practical courses and consistent training are required; this chapter points to where to get that training, not a substitute for it.

Tier 1: Short-to-Medium Term (Hours – 14 Days)

Goal: *Basic entry deterrence and safe firearm storage. Secure the home against opportunistic entry in the hours after an event, when normal security (locked doors, working alarms, visible occupancy) may be degraded.*

Tier 1's goal, basic entry deterrence, matters most in the immediate aftermath of an event, before anything has had time to escalate into a sustained threat.

Skills to Build

- **Lockdown:** Know how to rapidly secure every entry point (doors, windows, garage) as a single practiced routine, not something worked out in the moment. See the Home Lockdown & Barricading Basics skill guide for the full routine and the reinforcement upgrades behind it.

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The **Security & Self-Defense Addendum** builds these into real, tested competency.

For the hands-on how-to:

Firearm Safety, Storage & Self-Defense Basics | Home Lockdown & Barricading Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **Door/Window Sensors:** Battery-operated alarms to detect entry attempts, useful even with normal utilities degraded.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Lock reinforcement	3-inch strike plate screws, deadbolts	Replaces the short screws builders use by default, which anchor into the door jamb alone rather than the wall stud.
Light discipline	Blackout curtains or heavy blankets	Reduces visible signs of occupancy/supplies at night.

WARNING

Firearms Safe Storage

If firearms are in the home, regardless of what tier the household is otherwise operating at, safe storage is a Tier 1 baseline, not something to defer until active defense planning in Tier 3. Store firearms unloaded in a locked safe or lockbox; store ammunition separately from the firearm itself, which is standard practice in households with children; use a secondary device (a cable or trigger lock) as backup even inside a safe; and keep both genuinely inaccessible to children and anyone else unauthorized. If rapid access matters for home defense, a quick-access biometric or keypad safe is designed specifically to balance that speed against child safety; it's a real product category, not a compromise to avoid. This applies independent of the rest of this chapter's tiers. See the Firearm Safety, Storage & Self-Defense Basics skill guide

for the real tradeoffs between storage options, why Utah has no legal requirement to do any of this, and why owning a firearm is not the same as being trained to use one.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Deadbolts and strike plates upgraded to 3-inch screws
- [ ] Blackout curtains/blankets available for the main living areas
- [ ] Door/window entry sensors installed
- [ ] Any household firearms stored unloaded, locked, with ammunition stored separately
- [ ] Practiced: lockdown routine drilled as a single, fast sequence

Tier 2: Extended (2 Weeks – 3 Months)

Goal: *Managing OPSEC (Operational Security), organizing neighborhood coordination, and knowing the actual law around defending yourself, when police response is delayed or nonexistent.*

Tier 2 assumes normal policing and emergency response are degraded or unavailable, and that the household's supplies and stability may attract opportunistic attention over a period of weeks or months. The shift here is from reactive (Tier 1's lockdown routine) to proactive: reducing visibility and coordinating with neighbors.

Knowing where a household sits in the broader timeline changes what kind of planning actually makes sense here. Disaster sociology and emergency management research, including FEMA's own planning, describe a fairly consistent five-phase arc: Impact (hours to days, shock and disorientation), Heroic (days to about a week, adrenaline-driven mutual aid, the Community chapter's cooperative baseline at its peak), Honeymoon (about a week to 6 months, continued optimism as outside aid keeps arriving), Disillusionment (months to years, cooperation frays as unmet need accumulates and outside support withdraws), and Reconstruction (months to years, a new normal that may or may not resemble what came before). Tier 2's guidance is written for the disillusionment phase specifically: multiple studies find that helping behavior peaks in the first days and then declines even as real need continues, driven by the growing gap between what a community still needs and what outside support is still providing, not by a change in anyone's character.

Cooperation Erodes on a Predictable Schedule

Three shifts matter specifically for this tier. Networks contract toward bonding ties as bridging ties, the Community chapter's cross-neighborhood connections, are often the first to weaken under sustained strain. Eroding trust in outside institutions becomes self-reinforcing: reduced trust lowers cooperation with official guidance, which prolongs the disruption, which erodes trust further. And a community that's weathered more than one disaster develops what researchers call resilience fatigue, fraying networks and volunteer burnout from having made it through before. Don't assume a watch rotation or mutual aid network that worked once holds its shape automatically; check it rather than assume it.

Skills to Build

- **OPSEC (Operational Security):** Maintain light and noise discipline, and avoid discussing supply levels or security measures outside the household. The goal is to not stand out as a target in a stressed neighborhood.
- **Neighborhood Watch:** Coordinate patrols and share information with trusted neighbors: a network sees and covers far more than a single household can alone.
- **Perimeter Assessment:** Identify and clear concealment zones (overgrown bushes, debris, blind corners) near entry points where someone could approach unseen.

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Firearm Safety, Storage & Self-Defense Basics | Home Lockdown & Barricading Basics

Tech & Equipment

- **GMRS Radios:** Handheld radios for family/neighbor coordination. Unlike FRS radios, GMRS legally requires an FCC license: inexpensive (no test required, roughly a $35 fee covering the whole immediate family, valid for 10 years) but a real requirement, not a formality to skip. See the Communication chapter for the full radio picture.
- **Motion Sensor Lights:** Solar-powered, directional lighting to deter approach without relying on grid power.

- **Surveillance Cameras:** Battery or solar powered, with local SD card storage rather than cloud dependency: footage stays accessible even with internet and cell service down.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Barrier materials	Sandbags, gravel, heavy furniture	For blocking or slowing entry at weak points.
Signage	“No Trespassing,” “Protected by Alarm”	Deterrent value regardless of whether an alarm system is actually installed.
Community pact	Written agreement with neighbors	Patrol schedules and response protocols; use the Mutual Aid Agreement template to put it in writing before it's needed, not during a crisis.

Legal Note: Use of Force

Utah has Castle Doctrine and Stand Your Ground provisions, but the legal specifics of justified use of force, including what counts as an imminent threat and when retreat is or isn’t required, are genuinely complex and consequential to get wrong. This manual isn’t a substitute for that knowledge: take a certified self-defense law course (organizations like USCCA or an NRA-affiliated instructor offer these) and, if firearms are part of your plan, get proper training and verify current Utah law directly rather than relying on secondhand summaries, including this one. See the Firearm Safety, Storage & Self-Defense Basics skill guide for the specific statutes behind Castle Doctrine and Stand Your Ground.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Light/noise OPSEC discipline practiced by the household
- [ ] Neighborhood watch network established with trusted neighbors
- [ ] Concealment zones near the home identified and cleared
- [ ] GMRS license obtained if handheld radios are part of the plan
- [ ] Motion lights and battery/solar cameras (local storage) installed
- [ ] Written community pact in place with neighbors

- [ ] Use-of-force legal knowledge current via a certified course, if firearms are part of the plan

Tier 3: Permanent (Indefinite)

Goal: *Total fortification and establishing a defensible perimeter for long-term survival.*

Tier 3 assumes sustained instability with no return to normal policing in sight. The focus shifts from hardening a single structure to designing and maintaining an actual defensible position. For households in dense urban areas seriously weighing rural relocation, see the Shelter & Structural Safety chapter's Tier 3 for the shelter side of that same decision; the defensibility of wherever you land is the security side of it.

Skills to Build

- **Perimeter Defense:** Design layered barriers (fencing, natural terrain features, berms) that slow and channel approach rather than relying on a single line of defense.
- **Gray Man Theory:** The practice of making a home or person appear unremarkable, already-looted, or not worth the risk to target: often more effective than visible fortification, which can itself attract attention.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Establish community governance and clear rules of engagement in advance; most group failures in sustained crises come from internal conflict, not outside threats.
- **Construction:** Build reinforced structures, observation points, or concealed storage as ongoing projects, not one-time installs.

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Tech & Equipment

- **Long-Range Optics:** Binoculars and spotting scopes for early threat detection at a mile or more; early warning is worth more than any single defensive structure.

- **Perimeter Alarms:** Solar wireless sensors, tripwires, or seismic detectors along likely approach routes.
- **HF Radio Base Station:** For long-range intelligence and coordination with other groups. Legal operation requires an FCC amateur radio license in normal circumstances; the FCC does permit unlicensed emergency use when there's an immediate threat to life or property (47 CFR 97.405), but the right approach is getting licensed and trained now, not relying on the emergency exception. See the Communication chapter.
- **Thermal Imaging:** For detecting intruders in total darkness or heavy concealment.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Fortification	High-tensile fencing, reinforced gates, bollards	Focus on channeling and slowing approach, not just blocking it outright.
Defensive landscaping	Hawthorn, rose, barberry under windows/fences	A real, established technique (part of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design): thorny plantings deter approach without looking overtly defensive. Cross-check against the Shelter & Structural Safety chapter's wildfire defensible-space guidance before planting near a structure.
Barter/defense goods	Ammunition, firearms (if legally owned and trained), non-lethal deterrents	Ongoing proper training and safe storage matter as much as the equipment itself.
Community defense pact	Formalized mutual aid agreement	Shared guard duty and resource protection, building on the Tier 2 written pact, the same Mutual Aid Agreement template, extended and re-signed as the arrangement grows.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Layered perimeter (fencing, terrain, barriers) designed and built
- [ ] Gray Man principles applied; visible fortification balanced against not attracting attention
- [ ] Community governance and rules of engagement documented

- [ ] Long-range optics and perimeter alarms in place
- [ ] HF radio operator licensed and trained, not relying on the emergency-use exception
- [ ] Defensive landscaping installed, cross-checked against wildfire defensible-space rules
- [ ] Firearms training current and storage secure, if applicable
- [ ] Practiced: perimeter/observation routine drilled with everyone who'll stand watch

Tier 4: Sustainable Community

Goal: *Build a neighborhood-scale security system, with formal governance and shared watch capacity, so protection doesn't depend on any single household's stamina.*

A single household standing watch indefinitely is not sustainable: fatigue, illness, or just needing to sleep creates gaps no amount of equipment fixes. Tier 4 formalizes what Tier 2 and 3 started informally: shared watch rotations and written governance.

Start with the actual phase and the actual risk, not a vague sense that "more security" is good: the Heroic and Honeymoon phases, when most neighbors are still cooperating and outside help is still arriving, don't call for the same posture as the Disillusionment phase, when cooperation frays and a household's visible supplies may draw real opportunistic attention. Ask concretely how many households would actually participate, what the real local crime and security history is for this specific area, and whether a Neighborhood Watch or similar structure already exists here, even dormant, that just needs reactivating rather than building something new from scratch. Round-the-clock coverage is simple arithmetic, not willpower: figure a realistic shift length (commonly 2–4 hours before alertness genuinely degrades), divide 24 hours by that to get shifts per day, then divide by how many adults are actually willing and able to take one. Do that math honestly before committing to a schedule, not after people start missing shifts.

This chapter's companion

This chapter covers formal community governance for security specifically; the Shelter & Structural Safety chapter's Tier 4 covers the parallel question of sheltering displaced people, and the two are meant to run on the same written charter rather than two separate agreements. Surviving's Part 8 covers the coordination cadence that gets a group to this point, and Thriving's Governance chapter, a companion manual organized by a community's own life-stage, covers what actually makes a written charter hold, Elinor Ostrom's eight design principles drawn from 800+ real cases, not just this chapter's security-specific version of it.

WARNING

Observing and Reporting Stays Legally Safe; Detaining or Using Force Doesn't

A citizen's detention is a narrow legal exception, not a general right, and a private individual generally lacks the qualified immunity that protects an officer acting in the course of duty: get the specifics wrong, who was detained, how much force was used, whether the underlying belief was actually reasonable, and both criminal charges and a civil suit are real exposure, even when the underlying suspicion turns out to have been correct. Utah's own private-detention statute (Utah Code §77-7-3) was substantially amended in 2025, replacing "arrest" terminology with "temporary detention" and adding a separate force statute (§77-7-7.1); check the current text directly, since this is exactly the kind of statute that changes. Whatever your state's specific rule, train your watch group to observe, document, and call it in, not to intervene physically, that's the one practice that stays safe across every state's version of this law.

Skills to Build

- **Formal Community Governance:** Move from informal rules of engagement to a written charter (dispute resolution process, decision-making authority, and expectations for members) agreed on before it's tested by a real conflict. The Thriving's Governance chapter covers what actually makes a charter like this hold up in practice, not just what to put in it.
- **Collective Training & Cross-Training:** Run regular group drills so multiple people, not just one or two, can lead a response or stand a watch competently. A security system with a single expert is a security system with a single point of failure.
- **Rotating Guard Duty:** Formalize a sustainable watch schedule across multiple households so no one person or family carries the load alone indefinitely.

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Tech & Equipment

- **Shared Observation Post:** A community watchtower or elevated observation point with better coverage than any single household's perimeter alarms.
- **Community Alert System:** A siren, relay radio network, or other method to notify the whole group quickly, building on the Tier 2/3 radio equipment.
- **Shared Training Range/Space:** A safe, agreed-upon space for ongoing firearms and non-lethal deterrent training, so skills stay current across the group rather than fading after initial training.
- **Shared Perimeter Infrastructure:** Community-funded and maintained fencing, gates, or barriers at shared property lines, splitting cost and upkeep across households.

Materials & Supplies

Item	Quantity / Spec	Notes
Community defense cache	Shared ammunition/trauma supply reserve	Coordinate with the Medical Care chapter's shared medical cache; overlapping trauma supply needs.
Written charter/bylaws	Governance, dispute resolution, guard rotation	The actual document, not just a verbal understanding; verbal agreements fail under stress.
Shared perimeter materials	Fencing, gate hardware, signage	Split cost and maintenance responsibility across contributing households.

Northern Utah Note

Many Utah city police departments (Salt Lake City among them) already run active, formal Neighborhood Watch coordination programs, a legitimate, existing framework worth joining or using as a structural template now, well before Tier 4 conditions make it urgent.

Quick Checklist

- [ ] Written community charter/bylaws established, covering governance and dispute resolution
- [ ] Guard duty rotation formalized across multiple households
- [ ] More than one person per household cross-trained to lead response or stand watch

- [ ] Shared observation post and alert system established
- [ ] Community defense cache and shared perimeter infrastructure in place
- [ ] Watch group trained to observe, document, and call it in, not to intervene or detain physically
- [ ] Practiced: a full watch-rotation and community alert drill completed

At a Glance: Security & Self-Defense Across All Tiers

A single-page reference for planning purposes. This does not replace the detailed guidance above; use it to see how the plan scales, not as a standalone checklist.

Tier	Duration	Security Posture
Tier 1	Hours – 14 days	Lockdown routine, basic deterrence, safe firearm storage
Tier 2	2 weeks – 3 months	OPSEC, neighborhood watch, use-of-force law
Tier 3	Indefinite	Layered perimeter defense
Tier 4	Sustainable community	Formalized, rotating community watch