

Personal Safety: Precautions, Tips and Techniques

The information contained in this document has been gathered from various experts in assault prevention, law enforcement, self-defense and the martial arts.

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On the Street

1. Avoid walking alone, especially at night. Try to walk with a companion and vary your route.
2. Always be aware of your surroundings. Notice alleys, abandoned buildings, parked cars, people walking, people hanging out, lighted and dark areas, open stores, etc.
3. Walk briskly, with confidence and purpose – look to the left and right, and occasionally over your shoulder and behind you, as you walk.
4. Pick out places that you consider safe – places where you could run for help, make a stand if you must fight, or reassure yourself that you're not being followed or watched (stores, restaurants, lighted porches, bus stops, etc.)
5. It is safer to walk near the curb, in the middle of the street, and away from buildings, trees, shrubbery and alleys, which can hide potential assailants.
6. If you are being followed or you see someone further down the street who makes you feel uncomfortable:
 - cross the street
 - walk in another direction
 - ask other people walking if you can walk a short distance with them
 - stop a strange woman and pretend she's a long-lost relative
 - knock on the door of someone's home, explain the situation, and ask if you can stand there with them
7. If you're being followed by someone in a car:
 - cross the street and walk in the other direction
 - walk into the nearest store, gas station, office building, restaurant, etc.
8. If you have to prepare to defend yourself, use your voice first – *scream and yell and keep it up!* Assailants need privacy to carry out their plans. Your screaming will interrupt that privacy and call attention to the situation – the attacker may leave, or someone who hears the commotion may come to your aid.
9. When you go out, tell someone where you'll be and what time you expect to return, especially if you'll be with someone you don't know well.
10. Don't wear headphones while walking or jogging.
11. While waiting for public transportation, keep your back against a wall so you can't be surprised from behind.
12. When walking to your home, carry your house keys in your hand, not in your purse. Don't stand in a doorway fumbling in your purse or pocket for keys – have them ready to use.
13. If you're carrying packages (books, shopping bags, purse, etc.) be prepared to drop them to defend yourself. Your belongings are not important – keeping your body safe is.
14. If you're carrying a baby, put him/her down on the curb or sidewalk, away from and behind you. If the child is old enough, tell him/her to run away from the assailant and get help.
15. Be very observant when using an ATM machine. Look behind you. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, stop the transaction and leave.
16. Don't give friendly answers to a man who attempts to strike up conversations on the street. Walk away briskly and with purpose, and keep walking – no matter what he says.
17. If you do choose to give directions to a stranger on the street, remain at least two arm-lengths away.
18. Warn your children not to fall for ploys that kidnappers use: they may say they need help finding a lost puppy, or that a member of the child's family is in trouble. Consider giving your children a code word that an adult *must* say before the child will go along.

19. Clogs, high heels and tight skirts are hard to run and fight in. Capes, scarves and long necklaces are easy to grab. Consider wearing loose, comfortable clothing when on the street, and changing into dress clothes later. Think through how you would run or fight in dress clothes (kick off heels to run or hike up your skirt to kick).
20. If you're in an unfamiliar city, check a map – know where you're going. Looking lost increases your vulnerability.
21. If a robber demands your wallet or purse, give it to him. Belongings can always be replaced.

Purse-Snatching

1. Carry shoulder bags with the flap turned toward your body. Keep one hand on top of the purse.
2. Always keep your purse closed.
3. Don't let the purse swing from your arm when walking. Carry it in front of you.
4. Consider using a secure waist-pack instead of a traditional purse.
5. Don't leave your purse in a grocery cart, on a counter, or on the floor in a store (while you're trying on a coat, for example).
6. Carry credit cards in a different place than you carry money.
7. When carrying large amounts of money, separate it into several different places (purse, pockets, wallet, shoes, etc.)

In a Car

1. Do not pick up hitchhikers.
2. When alone in a car, keep the doors and windows closed and locked. If you need fresh air, open the window only enough to admit air, but not enough to admit a hand.
3. Don't travel on deserted roads, especially at night. It's better to drive on a main, well-lit highway, even if it takes a little longer to reach your destination.
4. Make sure you know exactly where you're going to reduce the chance that you'll have to stop in a strange neighborhood to ask for directions.
5. If someone suspicious approaches your car while you're stopped for a red light at a deserted intersection, run the light.
6. Don't let your gas tank fall below 1/4 full. Make sure oil, transmission fluid, tire pressure, etc. are all at optimal levels.
7. Don't leave valuables in plain sight inside your car.
8. When valet parking, give only the ignition key to the parking attendant – not the glove compartment or trunk key. And never give an attendant your house keys.
9. Don't return to your parked car and sit in it, balancing your checkbook, making a list, etc. An assailant could be watching, and this is an opportunity for him to catch you unaware. As soon as you get in your car, lock the doors and leave.
10. Do not enter a car without first checking to see if someone is hiding on the rear seat or floor. Do not enter a car on which a man is leaning. Turn around immediately and go back to where you were. If possible, ask someone to accompany you to your car.
11. If you are parked next to a van, enter your car from the passenger door. Many serial killers attack their victims by pulling them into their vans while the women are attempting to get into their cars.
12. Look at the car parked on the driver's side of your vehicle, and on the passenger side. If a man is sitting alone in the seat nearest your car, you may want to walk back into the mall, or work, and get a guard/policeman to walk you back out.

13. If you feel you're being followed, head for the nearest gas station, police station, lighted house, shopping center, etc. Do not stop or get out of the car until you're sure it's safe.
14. If you run out of gas or have an accident, lock the doors and stay inside the car. Accept no rides from strangers – wait for the police. If someone wants to help, ask them to call a repair truck or the police. Carry a road flare in your car. It can help draw attention if you break down. It can also be an effective weapon if necessary.
15. Carry a cell phone in your car, and keep a cell phone adapter (plugs into the car's cigarette lighter) in the glove compartment, in case the battery fails.
16. If you see an accident or stranded motorist, report it from the nearest telephone. Do not stop to assist – it could be a trap set up by a potential rapist or mugger.
17. Parking lots and garages are particularly dangerous. When you park your car, note your position (write it down if necessary) so you can go directly to it.
18. When walking to your car, keep your keys in your hand, for three reasons:
 - You won't be distracted (and more vulnerable), fumbling to find your car keys
 - Traditional keys may be used as a weapon to scratch and gouge the eyes of an attacker
 - An electronic car key has an alarm button that will make your car horn blare – use if you feel threatened
19. When returning to your car, look around. If you notice anything or anyone looking suspicious, alert the parking attendant or a security guard.
20. If you are afraid to go to your car alone, ask the parking attendant or a security guard to accompany you.
21. *Never get into a stranger's car, even if he threatens you with a weapon.* Immediately turn and run. An attacker will not use the weapon at the abduction scene (it is too public), but he will certainly use it once you are in his car, under his control. Do anything and everything possible to avoid getting into his car.

At Home

1. When moving into a new home or apartment, change all the locks on all outside doors. Have a safety chain installed on the inside of the door. Be sure the chain is short, and the screws are long enough to prevent a sudden, violent push from pulling them out.
2. Install a peephole in your front door.
3. Have locks installed on every window that an intruder can reach. There are also devices available that limit how far a window can be opened.
4. Use your locks all the time!
5. Consider installing an electronic security system for your home.
6. Keep shades and curtains drawn at night, especially if your home is accessible from the street. If a potential assailant sees you alone, he is more likely to try to enter the house.
7. Keep lights on in at least two rooms and have doorways and driveways lit at night. The cost of electricity for these precautions is minimal.
8. List only your last name and first initial on your mailbox.
9. Do not leave keys in a "secret" hiding place. It is much safer to leave them with a trusted friend or neighbor.
10. Keep your house keys on a separate ring from your car keys. Burglars conspire with parking lot attendants to have house keys duplicated while the car is parked.
11. Have your house keys in hand when you approach your front door. This prevents fumbling for them in your purse while you're standing outside.
12. If you come home and find doors or windows open, or if you suspect a burglary, don't enter the house. Instead, call police from the safety of a neighbor's house.

13. If you don't have a telephone extension in your bedroom, consider having one installed. Also consider installing a bolt lock inside your bedroom door. If you hear noises or suspect an intruder, bolt the door and call the police from inside the bedroom. Don't investigate suspicious noises when you're alone.
14. If you have an electronic car key, keep it beside your bed at night. If you hear a noise outside your home or someone trying to break in, press the panic button for your car. The alarm will be set off and the horn will continue to sound until either you turn it off or the car battery dies. (Test this to be sure, but the alarm should go off from most everywhere inside the house, whether the car is outside or in the garage)

Apartment Living

1. Some apartment buildings have front security doors that require a tenant's key to open. Never allow a stranger to enter that door with you. If necessary, slam the door in his face. If he's a tenant, he'll have his own key. If he's a guest, his host will let him in.
2. List only your last name and first initial on your mailbox and tenant register in the building's lobby.
3. Be alert when using laundry areas and underground parking garages. When entering such areas, survey the scene first for people hiding or hanging around. If the building has a parking attendant, determine where he/she is so you can get help if necessary.
4. Insist that management provide ample lighting in hallways, entrances, stairways, trash and parking areas. Also insist that shrubbery is kept trimmed down.
5. Get to know your neighbors. This enables you to more readily identify intruders and will help to insure that your neighbors will respond if you need help.
6. If you live with a roommate, consider a mutual agreement that no one be given an extra set of keys or be allowed to enter the apartment without permission.
7. Discuss with the building owner or realty agent the feasibility of keeping a dog. There may be a local statute allowing you to keep a dog for protection, even if your lease prohibits pets. Check for yourself with the local government agency.

Telephones

1. Never give any personal information to a stranger on the phone, and instruct your children to do the same.
2. Don't give a caller any reason to suspect that you are alone in the house.
3. If a caller becomes obscene or frightening, hang up immediately.
4. If a harassing or obscene call persists, call the police immediately, and contact your telephone company's Anonymous Calls Division.
5. Other tactics to consider:
 - screen your calls with an answering machine
 - get Caller ID service
 - dial *69 to automatically redial the last incoming call
 - blow a whistle into the mouthpiece or bang it on a table to jar the caller
 - tell the caller that the call is being monitored or recorded
 - take the phone off the hook for a while
6. Keep emergency numbers posted near the telephone or taped onto the phone.
7. Do not leave your full name on your answering machine. And don't leave a schedule of your times away from home on your answering machine.
8. Keep your cell phone charged or it will do nothing to help in an emergency.
9. Keep an old cell phone in your bedroom. Even if it is not activated, it will connect when you dial 911 – but you must keep it charged!
10. Even if you have no coins, any pay phone will connect if you dial 911.

Visitors, Repairmen, Deliverymen

1. Never reveal that you are alone in the house.
2. Never let small children answer the door; they are trusting and naïve, and are not able to determine the safety or relative danger of a situation.
3. Many assailants gain entry into homes by claiming to be repairmen. Install a peephole in your door, and use it to check out the caller.
4. Always check a repairman's photo ID card. Have him hand it through the opening left by your safety chain so you can study it. If you are not satisfied, take the card and call the company he claims to represent. Ask for a physical description of the man. If the description doesn't satisfy you, don't let him in. Use the same procedure for anyone asking to enter your home (census-taker, salesman, policeman, meter-reader, deliveryman, etc.)
5. Tell a deliveryman to leave packages outside your door. If a signature is required, have the man pass the clipboard through the chained door, sign it and return it the same way. Wait until you're sure he's gone before opening the door to get the package.
6. Be just as wary of women or children who ask to enter your home – they may be acting as accomplices to potential robbers. Many people have been robbed or mugged by allowing a woman or child to enter their home, under the guise of having car trouble or needing directions. Ask the person to wait outside and offer to make a phone call for her.
7. If you decide to open the door to a stranger, make sure the safety chain is hooked, then open the door only a few inches.

Elevators

1. When entering an elevator, be alert and observant. Who is in the elevator? Who else enters with you?
2. Allow the other passenger to push the button for his floor first, then push yours.
3. If a suspicious-looking person (or someone who makes you feel uncomfortable) follows you into the elevator, step out before it begins to move. Wait for the next one, walk the stairs, or if necessary, leave the building.
4. If you are alone on an elevator and a man/men who make you feel uncomfortable get on, you get off.
5. If all the other passengers get off the elevator except for a man you don't know, get off with the group and wait for the next car.
6. When entering an elevator, stand next to the control panel. Note where the Emergency and Alarm buttons are. Determine the location of the emergency phone and read the directions for its use.
7. If you suspect trouble, push the alarm button and as many other buttons as possible, so the elevator will stop at the next floor or so.
8. If you are approached, start screaming, yelling, swearing, swinging your arms and legs. Move in all directions. Moving targets are less accessible to assailants than stationary ones.
9. Respond to your gut feelings – they're usually accurate. It's better to feel foolish, embarrassed, or offend someone than to find yourself in a dangerous situation.