

Improving Your Personal Safety Awareness Skills

To avoid being an easy target for criminal activity, it is important to always be aware of your surroundings. Although anyone can become a victim of crime, you can greatly reduce your chances by considering the following information and safety tips.

Personal Safety Skills

One of the most effective ways to increase your personal safety is by practicing everyday situational awareness. Situational awareness is the ability to identify, process, and understand what is happening around you, while thinking ahead to prevent or reduce potential safety incidents.

In order for situational awareness to be a successful safety strategy, it will require regular practice.

Exercises to Increase Awareness Skills

The following activities can help you sharpen your ability to pay close attention to what is happening in your environment:

- **Scan your surroundings:** Be attentive to the small details of your surroundings and how you can utilize those characteristics to your advantage. Use walls and other barriers to protect your back and sides and maximize your field of vision, taking care not to back yourself into a corner. When your range of vision is limited, get creative about ways to expand it and give yourself an advantage. Use store windows, car windshields or even other people's sunglasses to detect threats you would not be able to see otherwise.
- **Determine an exit strategy:** Be aware of your exits and have an exit strategy. Practice devising alternate methods of escape if your primary exit becomes compromised. This principle is not just limited to buildings. It can be practiced in cars, public transportation, elevators, and even in outdoor environments.
- **Analyze places you often frequent:** Try not to get too complacent in familiar environments, such as your workplace or favorite lunch spot. Select places that you frequent and consider the layout of the space. Are there any areas where it would be easy for someone to ambush you? How can you avoid these areas? If you were ambushed, what would be the easiest escape route?
- **Practice engaging all your senses:** Regularly exercising your senses can make them keener, which can help you avoid unsafe situations, determine threats faster and pick up on critical information more quickly during emergencies. Listen for footsteps behind you. Smell for cigarette smoke indicating that someone else may be lurking nearby even if you cannot see anyone.

These are just a few tips to help you increase your situational awareness. Keep in mind that every environment provides unique conditions that will challenge your adaptability. View both new and familiar settings as an opportunity to practice and form good safety habits.

Basic Safety Strategies

The following safety strategies are suggested precautions you can apply to common situations.

Home Safety

- Do not indicate that you are home alone.
- Always ask who is at the door before opening it: use a peephole rather than a chain lock.
- For home repairs/maintenance work, ask for identification and call the company to verify.
- If someone comes to the door asking to use your phone, ask him to stay outside while you place the call.
- Teach children about answering the door and telephone safely.
- Do not hide house keys in places they might be found.

On the Street

- If you are carrying things, try to keep one hand free.
- If you are followed by someone on foot, turn around and check, then cross the street.
- If you are followed by someone in a car, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.
- Consider carrying a whistle, shriek alarm, or another noisemaker.
- Remember, you have the right not to reply if someone tries to engage in conversation.
- At night walk along well-lit streets, staying near the curb unless a car pulls up.

Driving a Car

- Keep all doors locked and the windows rolled up as far as is comfortable.
- If your car breaks down, turn on the emergency flashers, lift the hood, or place a “Call Police” sign in the window; stay in your car with the door locked until the police arrive.
- If you are followed while driving, go to the nearest police or fire station, open store; never pull over or drive home.
- Park in well-lit areas and always lock the car when you leave it.
- Check around and inside the car as you approach it.
- Carry your keys in your hand, ready to use. If there is a parking attendant, only give him/her your ignition key.

At Work

- If you are uncomfortable about getting on an elevator with a lone individual, wait for the next one. If you are made uncomfortable once on the elevator, get off at the next floor.
- Know the routes of escape in your work area.
- If you work late, find out who else is in the building; when you leave, ask someone (perhaps a security guard) to accompany you to your car.

While these situational strategies cannot guarantee your personal safety, they can give you a degree of control over potentially dangerous situations.

Resources

- Bureau of Justice Statistics: www.bjs.gov
- Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting: www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr
- National Crime Prevention Council: www.ncpc.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 877-595-5281

Online: guidanceresources.com

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