

AVOIDING VIOLENT CRIME: PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS FOR WOMEN

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MEMORIZE POLICE PHONE NUMBERS - 389-2000 (B.R. City Police) and *LSP (La. State Police).

HOME AND OFFICE – The most obvious and easiest thing you can do is **KEEP YOUR DOORS LOCKED**. Today, when you go home, check every window in your house – you might be surprised to find one that won't latch, or one that was left open inadvertently. Install pins in all windows, keeping the keys out of arm's reach from the window, but nearby in case of fire. All doors should be dead bolted. After having any type of maintenance or repair work done in your home, check all windows and doors to make sure they have not been tampered with by the work personnel for later access to your home.

DO NOT LEAVE KEYS TO YOUR HOUSE OUTSIDE.

Stones, fake canisters and other "hiding" places are as obvious to criminals as they are to you. Leave a key with a relative, trusted neighbor or friend instead.

If you plan to return home after dark, make sure to **LEAVE EXTERIOR LIGHTS ON** before you leave. Motion detector lighting is very effective.

DO NOT OPEN YOUR DOOR UNLESS YOU KNOW WHO'S ON THE OTHER SIDE. A chain or similar device still allows someone to force his way in. Install a peephole in your door. Even if you do not see anyone after hearing a knock, do not open the door – he could be standing just out of sight, ready to force his way in. Call through your locked door instead. Beware of any situation where someone comes to your door asking for money, whether they are selling something, asking for help, for donations to a cause, or looking for work doing odd jobs or yard work. They may be running a scam or casing your house.

IF APPROACHED WHILE OUTSIDE YOUR HOME, while working in your yard, for example, keep your distance. Make sure your house is always locked, whether you are inside or out. Keep a cell phone nearby, if possible, so you can easily call the police.

WHILE AWAY FROM HOME - BEFORE GETTING IN YOUR CAR, give it a quick visual check, outside and inside as you approach. Have your key in your hand, ready to use and check the back seat area as you enter your car. Have your vehicle serviced regularly and always try to maintain at least a fourth of a tank of gas in the car. Once inside your car, just like at home and work, **LOCK YOUR DOORS AND KEEP THEM LOCKED.**

IF YOU THINK YOU ARE BEING FOLLOWED, drive to the nearest police or fire station, trying to stay in well-traveled areas. If you have a cell phone, use it to call for help. Keep a recharging device in your glove compartment, in case your cell phone battery dies.

Stay alert at red lights and stop signs. Leave a space between you and the car ahead. **BE WARY OF VEHICLES BUMPING INTO YOU TO SIMULATE AN ACCIDENT.** If you do not have a car phone, and it is only a bump and not an accident, consider continuing to your destination and call the police when you arrive there. If in an isolated area and you suspect foul play, consider traveling to a more populated area to await law enforcement. Stay in your car while waiting for them to arrive.

If experiencing car trouble, **BE CAUTIOUS OF ANY FRIENDLY OFFER OF HELP.** The person offering assistance may intend to harm you instead. If you don't have a cell phone, ask him to call the police or a towing company by slipping him a business card with some change taped to the back through a crack in your window. Keep your doors locked, stay inside your vehicle, and wait for help to arrive. "Call Police" banners are useful; cell phones are better. Use common sense, and assess the situation carefully, considering the time of day, amount of traffic passing by, weather conditions, location of nearest exit, cross road, or populated area. Many interstate systems have call boxes, although they are not always in proper working order. Try to note the nearest mileage marker, so that you can report your location to law enforcement or roadside assistance services.

BEWARE THE HELPLESS STRANGER as well. Infamous serial killer Ted Bundy used a fake cast to create sympathy from victims, who helped him carry textbooks to his car.

WHEN EXITING ANY BUILDING, WHETHER HOME, OFFICE, STORE OR OTHER PUBLIC PLACE, look in all directions as you exit. When walking back to your car, try to walk in the middle of the driving area rather than close to parked cars. If you are parked at a far distance from the store exit and feel uncomfortable walking back to your car alone, or if you notice anyone suspicious, ask a mall security office or a store employee to accompany you. Have your keys in your hand, ready to use.

When **ON AN ELEVATOR,** be aware of fellow passengers. If you are alone or feel vulnerable, exit if anyone suspicious enters. Note important buttons such as "door open" or "telephone." Do not push the "Stop" button because this will immediately stop the elevator

and you may be trapped with someone harmful.

WHILE TRAVELING, put your business address on luggage tags. Carry a map of the area to which you are visiting. IN HOTELS OR MOTELS, keep the door dead bolted and drapes drawn at night. When answering a knock on the door, verify that it is someone you are expecting. If an unexpected person identifies himself as an employee, verify with the front desk that he has been sent to your room and ascertain the reason before letting him in.

Beware of giving out too much personal information to strangers you meet, such as where you are staying, your schedule, what places you plan to visit, and where you live. Keep an eye on your valuables; pickpockets often work in teams.

While exiting a hotel elevator, try to be sure that you are not followed to your room.

Many states now have the *__SP system for their state police, and most areas also have 911 services. Always carry your cell phone with you while traveling.

While away from home overnight, install timers on lamps in several rooms of your home. Ask a trusted neighbor, relative or friend to turn outside lights on in the evening and pick up your mail and newspaper.

Be aware that while away from home, **YOU ARE AT MOST RISK IN PARKING GARAGES, ON INTERSTATE RAMPS, AT GAS STATIONS, AND AUTOMATIC TELLER MACHINES.**

SOCIAL AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES - Young women in dating situations should never leave drinks unattended.

A "date rape" drug can be easily slipped into a glass. When returning from the dance floor or restroom, get a new drink directly from the bartender. When making plans to go out for the first time, consider meeting your date in a public place, letting someone know whom you are meeting and where you are going.

Vanity license plates with obviously feminine labels should be avoided. Consider omitting your address from the telephone directory. Caller ID is helpful in screening unwanted calls. Immediately report any harassing or obscene calls to the police and phone company.

WHILE EXERCISING OUTDOORS - The most important thing you can do is **STAY ONLY IN WELL-TRAVELED RESIDENTIAL AREAS**. Avoid isolated areas. Instead, stay in neighborhoods where houses are close to the street on both sides, and where area residents are engaged in outside activities.

DON'T ASSUME THAT YOU ARE ALWAYS SAFE DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS. Baton Rouge women have been abducted during daylight hours and murdered later. Do not assume that you are safe at any time, day or night. The safest times of any weekday are while people are getting ready for work and when people have just arrived home from work in the evenings.

BE VERY AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS AT ALL TIMES - NEVER WEAR HEADPHONES. Take notice of anything out of the ordinary - a suspicious car or person unfamiliar to you. Wearing headphones not only increases the likelihood that you will not hear someone approach from behind, but doing so sends a clear message to the outside world that you are not attuned to your surroundings. You might as well wear a sign on your back that says "Sneak up on me - I'm not paying any attention to you." (Don't assume that you can hear if you keep the volume low - I've startled people who weren't wearing headphones who didn't hear me coming).

In general, always **SCAN YOUR SURROUNDINGS, always ASSUME HOSTILE INTENT** from strangers, **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE** (at least 10 to 12 feet away), and remember that **MANY ATTACKS ARE PRECEDED BY ONE OF THREE QUESTIONS:** "May I use your phone?" "Do you have the time?" and "Do you know how to get to ...?" **Never** stop to answer such questions. It's okay to be rude. As soon as someone makes you stop or do something on which you had not planned, he has taken control of the situation. Keep moving and note avenues of escape.

TAKE A SELF-DEFENSE COURSE and if you wish, **CARRY PEPPER SPRAY** in your hand, but don't let either give you a false sense of security - pepper spray or any other type weapon can be knocked out of your hand. It's still better to avoid areas where an attack can take place. Don't depend on a dog to protect you unless it has been trained by a professional to do so (your dog may not be protective away from its territory). Additionally, if someone points a gun at you and demands that you get in a car, **DON'T!** Few criminals can accurately hit a moving target, so you're less likely to be injured by running away. It's far better to chance being shot on the spot than risk the virtual certainty that you'll be raped and murdered later if you get in the car.

All of the above mentioned suggestions are steps you can take to reduce your chances of becoming a victim.

It is important to remember, however, that **THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES.** Being attuned to your surroundings is the single most important aspect of self-protection. **MOST IMPORTANTLY, TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS. IF IT DOESN'T APPEAR RIGHT, IT PROBABLY ISN'T RIGHT.** Take steps to avoid becoming a victim

