

# Personal Safety

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## Common Sense

The main weapon you possess is Common Sense. If something looks and feels wrong: IT IS. Never ignore the feeling of the hairs on the back of your neck rising. That is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong – do something about it.

## Observation

One of the main skills we need is observation – the ability to see what is going on around us. Unfortunately, we are very good at looking, but not very good at seeing. Our eyes take in the information, but the brain – which can make mistakes, interprets this information. We tend just to scan what is around us with a quick glance; not giving the brain time to work out what is good and bad.

## Situational Awareness

This is the perception of environmental elements and the comprehension of their meanings. It involves being aware of what is happening in your vicinity in order to understand how information, events and your actions impact on your goals. Situational awareness is more of a mind set than a hard skill. It is important for identifying threats. We must accept that threats exist – denial, apathy and complacency can be fatal. Remember, there is no such thing as Low Threat; there is only High or Unknown threat. We are all responsible for our own security and safety. Always take notice of your intuition or gut instinct.

## Levels of Awareness

Being aware means that we take note of everything that is going on around us. This enables us to project a confident attitude – and not look like a potential victim. People who look like victims invariably become victims. There is a simple colour coding system that tells us the different levels of awareness. They are called Cooper's Colour Codes and are a very useful guide.

- **White.** Oblivious to your surroundings. 99% of people spend 99% of their lives in this state – call it daydreaming or preoccupied. People in this condition do not notice impending danger until it is too late. Walking with your head down, listening to music, using the phone all mean we are in White – the VICTIM STATE. Criminals don't want to work hard, so they target the lazy, inattentive, preoccupied and distracted individuals. He wants to get to the victim, get what he wants and escape without being caught or hurt.
- **Yellow.** This is a state of relaxed awareness, and we should be in this state for most of the time. All it means is that as you move around you are simply checking people, vehicles, secluded doorways, and alleyways – anywhere that a potential attack could happen. Remember ABH (Avoid Being Hurt). As you move, look AHEAD, BEHIND and for HAZARDS. This condition means we are relaxed but alert enough to spot any trouble coming and avoid it when

possible, or be ready for it if it can't be avoided. If we can't avoid it, we move to Condition Orange.

- **Orange.** This is a raised state of mind with a specific target noted. The difference between Yellow and Orange is that a specific target for your attention now exists. We now concentrate on this individual, but without losing focus on your surroundings – he may have an accomplice nearby. Why did he gain your attention? The clues could be his clothing, demeanour, actions, and eye contact. Did he pass you two minutes ago, and now he has come back the other way? The biggest clue is body language. 55% of communication is through body language. Criminals/Predators will display pre-aggression indicators that are easy to recognise. Nine times out of ten, nothing will happen and after a short time you can safely return to Yellow. However, the tenth may be the predator – the criminal who would have got you if you weren't prepared. We now play the What If? game. Mentally we are planning our response, “If he does this, I'll do that”. With a simple plan we are ready to respond, mentally and physically. If you are convinced there is a real threat, switch to Condition Red.
- **Red.** In Red, you are ready for Fight or Flight. Flight is always the preferred option – fighting is the last resort. Having made a decision, you are now physically and mentally prepared to move quickly and escape. If you have to use any self-defence technique, use it well and then escape. Be aware that the body will be flooded with adrenaline, your heart rate and temperature will rise, and

momentarily you may freeze. This has to be overcome, but it happens to everyone.

## Summary

These codes mean that you will constantly move from one colour to the next – it's impossible to stay in one state. If you stay mostly in Yellow it will become second nature to be alert to dangers without becoming paranoid. Orange and Red will allow you to plan an escape and do it.

## Security Management

Safety and security management are partially a matter of procedure. Procedures can only be effective if they are an appropriate response to the risks in the environment. This means that threats and vulnerabilities must be identified in every new environment. As the situation changes, so must the responses be analysed and changed as necessary.

Procedures are a preventative measure; they cannot always prevent an incident. If an incident occurs, those involved must use their own skills and judgement to survive. The management and aftermath of an incident are a management responsibility.

## Risk Assessments

A risk assessment involves evaluating existing physical and environmental security and controls and assessing their adequacy relative to the potential threats to an organisation.

## Risk Assessment Terminology

The following are the usual terms used when carrying out a risk assessment:

- **Threat.** A danger to you, your organisation or your property.
- **Vulnerability.** Your level of exposure to a particular threat.
- **Risk.** The likelihood and impact of encountering a threat (a combination of the threat and the vulnerability level).

## Personal Safety

Personal safety is a combination of three elements:

- **Responsibility.** We are all responsible for our own safety
- **Precautions.** A set of rules, developed through research and situational awareness that enable us to live and work safely.
- **Constant Awareness.** Using the different levels of awareness to be in the correct mental state to stay safe.

## Threats

There are two types of threat that we have to deal with.

**Inherent.** Inherent threats are those that are not directed personally at us, but have to be considered. Some examples are:

- Earthquakes
- Floods
- Poor roads
- Bad driving

**Targeted.** These are threats that may be directed intentionally at us, such as:

- Street crime
- Sexual violence
- Kidnap

## Areas to Consider

### Travel

**Prior to travel.** Consider the following: Copy important documents, it makes it easier to get them replaced if stolen or lost. The main ones are:

- Passport
- Driving licence
- Visas
- Credit cards

**Taxis.** Taxis can be used for the commission of crime against the unwary. If a taxi driver at an airport who says the office booked him approaches you, call and check:

- Only use a licensed taxi if possible. If not a metered taxi, negotiate the fare before you get in.
- Take valuable such as laptops and cameras inside, not in the boot. Keep them out of sight.
- Check the driver's photo ID.
- Always sit in the back and have your phone handy. Trust your instincts – if you have any doubts, don't get in. If you are worried, ask the driver to stop in a busy area, and get out.

**Driving.** In many parts of the world cars are easy targets for criminals, for robbery, car jacking, kidnap or sexual assault. Simple precautions will lower the threat:

- Never let a fuel tank get below half full. Half a tank of fuel will allow you to travel a considerable distance to escape a threat.
- Keep doors locked when driving, try to keep windows wound up, especially at traffic lights.
- Always park in well-lit car parks/streets. Don't leave any valuables in the car.

- When stationary, be aware of what people around you are doing.
- Do not stop to assist someone who has broken down. It may be the distraction for a robbery or car-jack.
- Drive on to the next garage or police station if someone tries to pull you over for no reason. Even if they prove to be genuine, better safe than sorry. Remember that unmarked police cars still have blue lights.
- Don't drive home if you think you are being followed. Memorize the registration number, drive to a police station and report it.
- Don't get out of the car if you have been accidentally bumped and you become suspicious. If it's a car jacking, as soon as you get out, the car will be stolen. If it happens, wind the window down slightly, and if they are genuine, you can exchange insurance details. Never give your address.

**Carjacking.** This is an ever-present threat in many countries, and can be very violent if any resistance is shown. Be aware of the risks and use these precautions.

- **Approaching the car.**
  - Stay alert.
  - Be ready to react to any threat
  - Look and listen: Who is around?
  - Trust your instincts. If anything makes you feel uncomfortable, walk away.
- **Driving.**
  - Doors locked, windows up, sunroof closed.
  - Remember driving distances (Two second rule, Tyres on Tarmac).
- Drive in centre lane of three lane highways.
- **Parking**
  - Check lighting if returning late.
  - Park close to the entrance, and close to other vehicles.
  - Avoid parking near wooded areas, vans and trucks.
  - Look around before exiting vehicle.
- **Attempted Hijack**
  - Don't go with attackers. Escape as soon as possible.
  - If weapons are seen, run.
  - If hijacked, and hijacker does not wear a seatbelt, consider a low speed crash to enable you to escape

**Street safety.** Be alert to your surroundings – Condition Yellow. Look and walk in a confident manner. Look at people and try to gauge their intentions.

- Seek local knowledge about bars/restaurants in safe areas.
- Know your route. Is there somewhere you can go if you feel threatened? Best idea is to head for a public place where you know there will be people. Never use short cuts and avoid badly lit areas. Look for the signs that you have strayed into a bad area and leave quickly.
- Look and act in a confident manner.
- Keep valuables out of sight – don't make yourself a target. Never have headphones in, and try not to use your phone whilst walking.
- If using pavement cafes, don't use tables near the kerb.
- Face oncoming traffic and don't walk next to the kerb.

- Carry enough cash to get through the day. If you have to use ATM's, try not to use street ATM's. If there is no alternative, have someone watch your back,
- Always know the route back to the Hotel or Office.

**Guarding possessions.** A few simple precautions will make it more difficult for pickpockets and casual thieves to grab your possessions.

- Carry your wallet in a groin pocket. Women carrying handbags should make sure it is closed, with the flap turned inwards.
- Consider carrying a dummy wallet. If you get caught out, you will only lose a minimum amount.
- If carrying a backpack, use both shoulder straps. If carrying a shoulder bag, it is dangerous to have the strap over the neck – it makes it very easy for an attacker to drag you away.
- Consider carrying photocopies of passports, and leave the passport in the hotel room safe.
- Leave the good stuff at home. Don't make yourself an attractive target. Nothing you own is worth getting hurt for.

## Selection of Potential Victim

**Evaluating the potential victim.** The following are signs of being evaluated by an attacker:

- Anyone who appears to be watching you. If every time you look up the same individual is looking at you, ask yourself “Why?”
- Anyone who is inactive until you approach and then tries to look busy.

- Anyone whose activity mimics yours. You speed up; he speeds up etc.

**Positioning for an Attack.** Any attacker must get close. It may be done by stealth or ruse. He may ask for the time, change, directions – anything to distract the victim and make him look away from the attacker. When the victim looks away, the attack happens. Always refuse any request politely, no matter what it is. Keep your eye on him, say NO and keep moving. Watch for these clues:

- Anyone who falls in behind you after you walk by.
- Two or more people who are together, but split up as you approach.
- Anyone staying in one place, observing, but then moves towards you.
- Two or more people lined up against a wall or fence.
- Anyone who moves to block an exit, after you enter a confined space.

**Actions if suspicious:** If one of these clues is seen, cross the street; change direction; turn a corner. If he matches your course – he has given the game away. Go to Orange and start planning an escape.

## Socialising

**Bars and Restaurants:** It is too easy to let your guard down while you are socialising. Alcohol makes us relax and become an easy victim, particularly when working in an unfamiliar area.

- Trust your instincts – if the atmosphere feels wrong – leave. There are lots of other pubs.

- Look for an escape route. Don't use places that only have one-way in and out.
- Try to sit where you can see the entrance.
- Keep away from windows; remember criminals will use the windows to look for potential victims.
- Don't accept drinks from strangers. If you do, make sure it's in a sealed container.
- If you feel ill, get someone to take you home – NEVER LEAVE ALONE. If you think you have been fed a date rape drug you are very vulnerable. Do not leave on your own. One of the objectives of these drugs is to isolate the intended victim. Get someone to take you hospital and as soon as possible, report it to the police. Date rape drugs are not just used for sexual assaults – they also make you very easy to rob.
- Avoid prolonged eye contact with strangers – it will bring unwanted contact.
- If any kind of violent incident starts leave the site.

## What if it goes wrong?

**Proxemics.** Proxemics dictates how close we let people get to us. Consider the following areas:

- **Public Space.** We have no control of anyone in public space. However, in Condition Yellow, this is where we pick up people's possible intentions and think of escape options. There is no defined distance.
- **Personal Space.** Personal Space is defined as two arms lengths from you. If a stranger is in this space, he is too close. The

predator wants to get in to this space – and will use any of the methods we have discussed to get there.

- It may be enough to raise a hand and shout “Stop” to deter him momentarily, and provide the distraction for you to escape.
- **Intimate Space.** No one should be in your intimate space unless you want him or her there. If you look in someone's eyes and can't see his feet in your peripheral vision, he is in your intimate space. You are now going to have to do something quickly!

**Confrontation.** Being confronted by an attacker is a terrifying experience, no matter how confident you are in your ability to deal with it. You must make an instant assessment of your capabilities – and those of your attacker. If he has a weapon, such as a knife, you are going to give him your possessions! You don't own anything worth getting hurt for. Assess the following differences between you and him: Sex, age, size, relative strength, Knowledge/Training, alcohol, drugs, mental state, weapons.

**Options.** These factors will probably dictate your actions. Realistically, we have two options – to use our Verbal skills, and as a last resort, our Physical skills.

**Verbal De-escalation.** In a mugging or robbery, this is probably not an option. He doesn't want to talk to you; he just wants your possessions. In other types of confrontation, you may be able to talk your way out of trouble. Use Active Listening techniques to talk him down. However, never say to anyone “Calm Down” or “What's the Problem?” You must remember that very little communication is

verbal. Communication is broken down into these percentages:

- Verbal: 7%
- Para-language (pitch, tone, rhythm, tempo): 38%
- Body Language: 55%

**Body Language.** Body language is very important during any confrontation. It may be your body language that causes him to attack. His body language will indicate to you that an attack is coming. Consider these factors:

- **Physical Appearance.** Look and appear confident – project a confident attitude.
- **Facial Expression.** Try to keep a neutral expression. Don't look frightened – it gives him the upper hand. Don't make prolonged eye contact – it is aggressive.
- **Stance.** Stand in a social stance, arms by your side. Don't raise your hands above your waist, or clench your fists - they are threatening gestures. If you can stand with one leg slightly dropped back, do so.
- **Touching.** Never reach out to touch him as a calming gesture. It will have the opposite effect and probably hasten a physical assault.

**Physical Responses.** Physical responses are a last resort. We are not going to fight or restrain anyone, but use some simple techniques to enable us to escape. We must be able to recognise the physical signs of an attacker building up to launch an attack – and escape before it happens. Look for these signs:

#### **Indications of Possible Assault.**

Building up to an assault, he will invariably display these characteristics:

- Head and shoulders back
- Facial colour will darken
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Belligerent, shouting, challenging
- Exaggerated hand movements
- Hands held high
- Uninterrupted eye contact

**Escape.** At this point, it is still possible to escape. If you see the chance, take it.

**Danger Signs – Assault Imminent.** If you have not escaped, and the attack becomes inevitable, he will change to the following:

- Head down
- Eyebrows frowning
- Facial colour pales
- Lips tighten over teeth
- Rapid deep breathing
- Changes stance to fighting stance
- Fist clenching
- Target glances/ranging touched
- Body weight drops

**Options.** Options are now limited. The best you may be able to do is cover up, try to avoid blows and run if possible. Read his body language, recognise the signs and get out of there. If you use a physical response, it must be effective – and don't hang around to admire your handiwork.

**Personal Attack Alarms.** Don't put your faith in these. They are not loud enough to put an attacker off, and will anyone take any notice of it and come to your aid?

**Chemical Sprays.** Mace and Pepper spray are illegal in UK. There is a legal alternative called VestGuard Defense Spray that emits a non-toxic overwhelming odour. It also sprays the attacker with UV dye to help with identification. Alternatively, deodorant or hairspray in the eyes works well. If you are going to use it, never give a warning. Use it and run.

**Physical Responses.** The best physical response is to run from the situation. It may be necessary for you to use a physical technique to enable you to do so. Anything you do must be:

- **Simple.** No Ninja back flips! Whatever you do must be easy to learn, employ natural body movements, and involve gross, not complex motor skills.
- **Rapid.** We are not going to fight or try to restrain an attacker, but gain time to escape. Anything we do must take no more than a couple of seconds.
- **Effective.** Only use techniques that work for you!

#### **Effects of physical responses.**

Whatever we do the object is to achieve Surprise – Shock – Pain to allow us to release from a grip, escape from a hold and extract ourselves from the situation.

**Weapons of Last Resort.** We carry things in our pockets that can be used as effective weapons. It takes practice to become efficient, but is worth learning. No improvised weapon can be relied on – you

may have left your pen on your desk! Try these:

- **Pen.** Useful to poke into eyes, throat and face. Stab as many times as you can.
- **Credit Card.** Use to cut nose/eyes.
- **Phone.** Ram into eye/throat.

**The Law.** The law allows us to defend ourselves, but there are rules. In a court case, the following questions will be asked:

- Was the use of force necessary in the circumstances – was there a need for any force at all?
- Was the force used reasonable in the circumstances?

### **Summary**

The best course of action is not to become a victim. Remember:

- Look and act confidently.
- Be purposeful about your intentions.
- Stay alert.