

Safety Away from Home

On the Street and Other Places

When going out for a walk:

- Don't go out under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They will impair your judgment and reactions.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Walk with a friend, family member, or big dog.
- Don't go out alone at night, venture into unfamiliar or dark places, take shortcuts, talk to or accept rides with strangers, or hitch rides. Don't walk in or near alleys, on deserted streets, near dark doorways or shrubbery.
- Don't approach vehicles even if the occupants say they need directions or assistance.
- Avoid verbal confrontations. They may lead to physical altercations.
- Carry a working cell phone. Otherwise know where phones are located along your route. 911 calls are free but carry charge for other calls for assistance.
- Carry only necessities, i.e., identification (not a Social Security card), medical information, names and phone numbers of people to call in emergencies, some cash, and a credit card.
- Don't carry a gun, knife, club, chemical spray, or other weapon. Some are illegal to carry and all could be used against you.

If you are out running, also:

- Vary your route.
- Don't run on deserted streets or trails.
- Don't run at dusk or at night.
- Run with a partner or a dog.
- Don't wear a headset. Not only won't you hear someone approaching but you may get so distracted by what you're listening to that you won't be aware of your surroundings.

For information on self-defense and related topics go to www.nononsenseselfdefense.com. If you want to learn self-defense, take classes only from licensed instructors. But don't substitute self-defense training for common sense, alertness, and caution.

Follow the four **As** of self-defense to avoid becoming a target, and if threatened or attacked, what to do. These are **ATTITUDE**, **AWARENESS**, **ASSESSMENT**, and **ACTION**.

Maintain a confident **ATTITUDE**.

- Know where you are going and walk with confidence.
- Make eye contact with people you pass.
- Speak in a strong assertive voice if someone approaches you in a hostile or suspicious manner. Tell them to stop or back away.

Be **AWARE** of your surroundings and who or what is nearby.

- Listen to your intuition. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't.
- Watch your surroundings. Leave any places in which you are uncomfortable. Be especially alert for suspicious persons around banks, ATMs (Automated Teller Machines), stores, your home, etc.
- Be wary of strangers who seem overly friendly, ask a lot of questions, or ask for help.
- Never turn your back to a stranger.
- Be wary if a vehicle pulls up beside you.
- Be especially alert when alone in a dark parking lot or structure or any isolated area.

ASSESS the situation and possible threat if you find yourself in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation.

- Consider your options in the event you are threatened, e.g., scream or blow a whistle to attract attention, escape to a safe area, stay and fight, etc. Decide what you plan to do and practice your responses so you can recall them in a real situation.
- Does the person threatening you have a weapon? What kind?
- Does the person threatening you have an accomplice?

ACT quickly and decisively if you cannot avoid physical actions against an attacker.

- Keep a safe distance from strangers who stop you for directions or conversation.
- Cross the street if you think someone is following you.
- Call 911 and walk into the nearest open business or other safe place if someone is following you.
- Don't let someone get close enough to grab you. Watch their hands and feet for indications of hostile intent.
- Don't let anyone back you up against a wall or other object.
- Try to dodge blows by moving to the side and then behind the attacker.
- Move to the side, not backwards if someone is striking at you.
- Don't struggle or try to pull away if someone grabs you from behind. Use your feet, elbows, fingers, and the base of your hand to disable the attacker and then escape.
- If you fall to the ground, yell and kick.
- Aim for the most vulnerable body parts, i.e., eyes, nose, throat, chin, knee, and groin.
- Objects like umbrellas, keys, and shoulder bags make effective weapons when used against vulnerable body parts.

At Work

- Keep all doors locked during office/business hours except those designated for public use. Some employees or security guards should be located to monitor each public entrance. Post signs to indicate areas that are open to the public and those that are for employee access only. Emergency exits should be alarmed and marked for emergency use only.
- Keep all doors locked if you work after hours. Never open them to any strangers.

- Keep public restrooms locked or under observation.
- Lock up your purse and other valuables when you leave your office or workplace.
- Don't open the office/business alone, if possible. One employee should remain outside while the other checks inside to make sure it is safe to enter. It is also better to have two employees present when the office/business is being closed for the day.
- Don't make bank deposits alone, if possible. Vary deposit time, route, and method of concealing the money. Carry the money in a purse or plain bag; never use a bank bag. Make deposits during the business day, not after closing time.
- Don't take out trash alone, if possible. Check outside first to make sure that there are no suspicious people near the door or trash bin. Keep the area well lighted and clear of any objects that could provide hiding places.
- Call the SDPD or the alarm company to verify any report of a break-in and request to come to your office/business.
- Be familiar with the emergency procedures and alarms in your office/business.

In any confrontation with a criminal:

- Be calm and follow instructions exactly. Don't make any sudden moves.
- Don't risk your personal safety. Don't resist and try to be a hero.
- Consider all guns as loaded weapons
- Activate alarms and alert co-workers only if you can do so without being detected.
- Observe the criminal's features, clothing, behavior, means of escape, etc. without being obvious about it. Being a good witness is critical in helping the police to locate and arrest the criminal.

On Elevators

- Don't get on an elevator with a stranger. If you do, stand near the control panel and be ready to press the alarm button and other controls if you are attacked.

When Meeting Someone New

- Exchange phone numbers only, not addresses.
- Let a friend or family member know where you are going on a first date.
- Consider a daytime meeting for a first date.
- Be assertive and honest, not passive or coy.

At Night Clubs and Social Functions

- Go with and stay close to a friend.
- Use prearranged signals to indicate that you need help or want to leave.
- Don't allow alcohol or drugs impair your judgment.
- Watch your drinks and don't give anyone an opportunity to spike them.
- State your personal social standards and limits. Stick to them and don't let anyone change your mind.
- Avoid people who make you nervous or uncomfortable.
- Provide your own transportation when you go out alone. Take enough money for a cab fare if you are going to be out late.

When Traveling on Vacation or Business

- Travel with a friend or in a group when possible. There is safety in numbers.
- Plan your touring. Don't discuss your plans with strangers. Beware of strangers who seem overly anxious to help you. Select guides carefully.
- Ask your hotel concierge or desk clerk about dangerous areas and avoid them.
- When you go out tell the hotel manager when you expect to return and who to call if you're not back by then.
- Get good directions to avoid getting lost.
- Find an open business to get directions if you get lost. Don't appear to be lost by stopping and looking at addresses or street signs.
- Stick to well-lighted main streets and public areas.
- Carry a minimum amount of cash. Use credit cards or traveler's checks whenever possible.
- Keep a record of your credit card and traveler's check numbers in a safe place. Also have the phone numbers to call if your cards or checks are lost or stolen.
- Leave your itinerary with a friend or relative and check in with them periodically.
- Store photocopies of your passport, tickets, and other important papers in a hotel safe.
- Keep track of time and don't be late for appointments or meetings.

In a Hotel/Motel Room

- If the desk clerk says your room number aloud when you check in, ask for a different room and have the number written on your keycard sleeve and discreetly handed to you.
- If you feel uncomfortable walking to your room alone, ask the desk clerk to provide an escort.
- Determine the most direct route to and from your room, to fire escapes, stairs, elevators, and phones.
- Keep your door locked when you are in your room. Use both the deadbolt lock and the security bar/chain.
- Keep your windows locked, and blinds and drapes closed for privacy.
- Be sure that sliding glass doors and doors to connecting rooms are locked. Safeguard your room key or card at all times.
- Use the peephole in the door to identify anyone requesting entry. Open the door only if you are certain it is safe to do so.
- If you are worried about being spied on through the peephole in the door cover it with a piece of opaque tape.
- If you haven't requested room service or housekeeping and someone knocks on your door claiming to be a staff member, call the front desk to verify the claim before opening the door.
- If you receive a call about an emergency that requires you to leave your room, hang up and call the front desk to verify it.
- Report any suspicious persons or activities to the front desk.
- Don't stay in a ground-floor room, especially if you are a woman and traveling alone.

While Driving

- Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Drive to the nearest open business and call **911** if anyone is following you. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.
- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them in the trunk or on the floor.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call or drive to the nearest phone and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.
- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off-ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.
- Control your gestures and other reactions to keep "road-rage" incidents from escalating to violence.

In Parking Lots and Garages

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination.
- Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out.
- Avoid parking or walking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Report any lights that are out to the facility operator.
- Lock your vehicle and take your keys with you.
- Never leave any valuables in plain sight.
- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Wear shoes or clothes in which you can easily run to safety if threatened. Kick off high-heeled shoes and run barefoot if you are pursued.
- Remember where you parked so you can return directly to your vehicle. Be alert and walk purposefully.
- Don't overload your arms with packages. Use a cart or make another trip.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately when you return to your vehicle.
- Check that no one is hiding in or around your vehicle before you get in.
- If a van has parked next to your vehicle, enter it on the other side.
- Lock the doors immediately after getting in your vehicle.

- Ask a co-worker or security guard to escort you to your vehicle if you are uncomfortable about walking alone. Or wait until more people are around.
- Don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys when you use valet parking. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible. Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.
- Don't resist or argue with a carjacker. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle. Be especially alert when parking at fast food places, gas stations, ATMs, and shopping areas along suburban highways.

While Riding a Bus or Trolley

- Wait in a central area near other passengers.
- Have your fare or pass ready when boarding.
- Sit near the operator.
- Keep your handbag and packages on your lap instead of on the floor or seat next to you.
- Change seats and tell the operator if anyone bothers you.
- Avoid using dark or isolated stops at night.
- Stay alert for any possible dangers when exiting.

When Carrying a Purse or Wallet

- Before you go out make a list of the entire contents of your purse or wallet. Include all card account numbers and phone numbers to call to report a lost or stolen card. Keep a copy at home.
- Carry only a driver's license, cash, and one credit card. Don't carry anything with a PIN or password written on it. Don't carry blank checks or a checkbook.
- Don't carry your Social Security card or anything with your Social Security number on it. Persons with Medicare cards should carry photocopies of the cards with the last four digits of their Social Security number removed. Keep the card in a safe place at home.
- Don't carry personal information of your family members.
- Avoid carrying a purse if possible. Wear a money pouch instead.
- Carry a purse with a shoulder strap if you must. Keep the strap over your shoulder, the flap next to your body, and your hand on the strap. Hang the purse diagonally across your body.
- When wearing a coat and carrying a purse, conceal the strap and purse under the coat.
- Keep a tight grip on your purse. Don't let it hang loose or leave it on a counter in a store.
- Carry your wallet, keys, and other valuables in an inside or front pants pocket, a fanny pack, or other safe place. Don't carry a wallet in a back pocket.
- Never put your purse or wallet on a counter while shopping.
- Don't fight for your purse if someone tries to take it by force. Your safety comes first.

What to Do If Your Purse or Wallet Is Lost

- File a police report in the city where your wallet was lost or stolen, and keep a copy of the report.
- Report the loss to the three nationwide consumer reporting companies: Equifax at (800) 525-6285, Experian at (888) 397-3742, and TransUnion at (800) 680-7289. Ask to have a fraud alert placed on your credit reports. It will tell creditors to follow certain procedures before they open new accounts in your name or make changes to you existing accounts. In placing a fraud alert you will be entitled to free copies of your credit reports. Order them a few weeks after your loss and review them carefully. Look for inquiries from companies you haven't contacted, accounts you didn't open, and debts on your accounts that you can't explain. Fraud alerts are good for 90 days and can be renewed. They are free.
- Alert your banks of the loss and request new account numbers, checks, ATM cards, and PINs. Also provide new passwords and stop payment on any missing checks.
- Contact all your creditors by phone and in writing to inform them of the loss.
- Call your credit card companies and request account number changes. Don't ask to cancel your accounts; that can hurt your credit score, especially if you have outstanding balances. Say you want a new numbers issued so your old numbers will not show up as being "cancelled by consumer" on your credit reports.
- Call the security or fraud departments of each company you have a charge account with to close any accounts that have been tampered with or established fraudulently. Follow up the request in writing and ask for written verification that the accounts have been closed and any fraudulent debts discharged. Keep copies of all documents and records of all conversations about these transactions. If you still want a charge account, request a new number.
- Contact the IRS if your Social Security card or any other card with your SSN on it was in your purse or wallet. This will alert the IRS that someone might use your SSN to get a job or file a tax return to receive a refund. Call its Identity Theft Hotline at **(800) 908-4490** and go to <http://www.irs.gov/privacy/article/0,,id=186436,00.html>. Follow the directions there regarding identity theft and your tax records, and the need to provide it with proof of your identity. Also contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) on its Fraud Hotline at **(800) 269-0271** or by e-mail to the Office of the Inspector General at www.ssa.gov/org.
- Call the SSA at **(800) 325-0778** if your Medicare card is lost or stolen. And ask for a replacement.
- If your driver's license was lost, contact the California DMV Fraud Hotline at **(866) 658-5758** to report the theft and see if another driver's license has been issued in your name.
- If your library card was lost, contact the library immediately. You could be held financially responsible for any material borrowed after the loss.
- If your health insurance card was lost, notify your company.

When Using an ATM

- Use ATMs that are inside a store or a bank. If you use an outside ATM, it should be well-lighted, in a busy area, under video surveillance, and have clear lines of sight in all directions, i.e., there should be no nearby building corners, shrubs, signs, etc. that could provide possible hiding places for an attacker.

- Get off your cell phone and be alert when using an ATM.
- Be aware of your surroundings before and during your transaction, especially between dusk and dawn. Return later or use an ATM in a store if you notice anything suspicious, e.g., a person loitering nearby.
- Complete your transaction as fast as possible and leave the facility.
- Don't go alone.
- Park in a well-lighted area as close to the ATM as possible.
- Keep your doors locked and passenger and rear windows rolled up when using a drive-through ATM.
- Put your cash, receipt, and ATM card away promptly. Count your cash later in private. Do not leave your receipt at the ATM site.
- Avoid being too regular. Don't use the same ATM at the same time of day and day of the week.
- Make sure you are not being followed when you leave an ATM location. Drive immediately to a police or fire station, or any well-lighted and crowded location or open business and get help if you are being followed. Flash your lights and sound your horn to attract attention.
- Give up your money or valuables if you are confronted by an armed robber. Any delay can make a robber more nervous and increases the likelihood of violence.

On a Cruise

- Be skeptical. Don't assume you can trust other passengers. Criminals take vacations too.
- Stay sober. Don't let alcohol impair your judgment. Only drink beverages you have seen prepared. Ask that bottled drinks be served unopened.
- Set rules for your children and keep an eye on them. Make sure they don't drink. Report any crew members who serve alcohol to minors.
- Meet fellow passengers in public areas, not cabins.
- Use all locks on your cabin door. Never open it to a stranger.
- When you enter your cabin check the bathroom and closet before closing the door.
- Don't socialize with the crew. Make sure your children know that crew areas are off limits.
- Dress down. Leave expensive jewelry and watches at home. They only make you a target for thieves.
- Lock all valuables in a safe and guard your key card as you would a credit card.
- Don't stand or sit on the ship's railing.
- Never go to any isolated areas of the ship alone, especially in the evening and early morning.
- Know where the members of your party are at all times. Report a missing person immediately.
- Attend the ship safety drills and learn its emergency procedures.
- Bring phone numbers of U.S. embassies or consulates in the cities on your itinerary so you can contact them if a problem arises. You can get them online at www.usembassy.gov.
- If you are a victim of a crime at sea call the FBI at **(202) 324-3000** from the ship to report the crime. Call the U.S. embassy or consulate if you are a victim of a crime on shore. Take photos of the crime scene and any injuries you suffered. Get the names, addresses, and phone numbers of possible witnesses. Take statements. Don't expect the cruise line to take physical evidence. Also notify your family, doctors, lawyers, insurance companies, etc. as appropriate.

Avoiding Terrorists

- Before you leave go the U.S. Department of State website www.travel.state.gov to check Travel Alerts and Travel Warnings.
- Avoid large chain hotels or ones near U.S. embassies or consulates. Choose small hotels in quiet neighborhoods.
- Visit major attractions at less-busy hours.
- Avoid restaurants and clubs frequented by Americans.
- Don't wear clothes that advertise your nationality.
- Register with the nearest American embassy or consulate or do it online at travelregistration.state.gov so you can be contacted in the event of a crisis or emergency.