

A Practical Guide to Staying Safe While Traveling and Commuting

Guiding principle: Remain aware of your surroundings and use common sense.

Risk Mitigation

The best way to mitigate the risk of harm is to remove either the threat or the vulnerability. You can do this by not being where there is risk, or by taking basic steps to lower your chances of being vulnerable or running into a threat.

Learn before you go. Research the place and the environment. If you don't know what could go wrong, and what to do about it before you go out of the door, you've already lost.

Focus on personal awareness. What you project out and your demeanor. This helps reduce your signature and you become less likely to be targeted. Focus on being boring and simple. Wear what everyone else is wearing and mitigate being targeted because you stand out. Blend in and maintain a low profile.

Be mindful of how you behave. Pay attention. Leave the phone in your pocket, remove the earphones from your ears, and move with purpose, head up, looking around. Project a sense that you are aware and that you can defend yourself.

Ultimately it is up to you to remain safe. Don't rely on anyone but yourself. Live with the decisions you make, so **learn to make good decisions with little information.**

Basic Do's and Don'ts

Use common sense. If something doesn't look right or your "gut" is telling you that you need to leave, then do it. Listen to your intuition, but use common sense. Sometimes what appears to be a threat, is not, and what appears to be nothing, it's a threat lurking around the corner.

Pay attention to your surroundings.

Situational awareness. Observe what's going on around you, and also further out. It's like driving a car: if you see all the cars in front of you suddenly stopping, maybe it's time you stop as well, even if you are not there yet. Keep an eye on the near and one eye on the far.

Always carry a communication device with you. Whether it's your phone or any other device, **make sure it's in your pocket and not in a bag**, which can be stolen. Make sure you carry the charge for that device as well.

Avoid the masses. Avoid peak rush hours, if possible, and do not get lured into taking part in demonstrations or similar large gatherings. If an incident happens, try to leave immediately, do not linger in the location.

Always know where the "safe heavens" are. Whether your office, a friendly cafe, or the house of a friend or family member, **always know where to go if there is an emergency.** Preplan this ahead of time and have at least two different routes to get there. Beware of choke points - the places where you must pass

on your way to a safe place, where bad actors can potentially wait for you.

Always have a backup plan. Things go sideways often, so plan for it and get ahead of the problem.

Packing and Carrying

Use the right pack. Try to choose a pack that is big enough to carry what you need, but small enough to allow you to move fluidly and unencumbered by weight. A weather-resistant and low-key pack is best. Do not attract attention. Keep your wheeled luggage out the equation. Pack light, go fast, and remain safe.

Organize your packing. Get in the habit of always storing each item you pack in the same place, this way you can always find things quickly, even in the darkness or under stress. Make sure you pack critical items, like a flashlight or medication, in a front-accessible pocket.

Carry your pack correctly. Always carry a backpack by the two straps, and a sling bag across your body. This way you are minimizing the risk of the pack being snatched by someone on a vehicle or a pedestrian running near you.

Make sure that critical items are in your person, such an ID, phone, and wallet, not in the bag. If needed, discard the pack, knowing you are still good to go. It may save your life.

Walking in the Street

Rule: Maintain a low profile. Be boring. Pay attention.

Understand where you are. Not all streets are the same, but all can be potentially dangerous. Be careful. Build a baseline of the area, a map of what normal looks like. If you know the street well, then you can focus on the little changes, and note the things that deviate from the norm.

Keep your eyes off your phone and your ears open. Do not use headphones. Move your head around continuously scanning from near to far, and assessing everyone you see. Remember, there are visible threats, but there are also more subtle threats that will be easier to miss.

Walk with the flow of people, don't be the one person that walks against the traffic. This will make you noticeable and a potential target.

In general, but especially if you are in a risky location, walk with purpose, do not linger, and show anyone observing you that you can handle yourself.

Always put your wallet, phone, and other valuables in your front pockets and, if possible, put your hands in your pockets. This will prevent people running into you and picking your pockets.

As you approach a corner or intersection, slow down and walk away from the buildings toward the street side of the sidewalk. Pie the corner to see if anyone is waiting for you on the other side of the corner: slowly take steps bringing more and more of the corner into view until you see all the other side.

Pay special attention to what's around you as you transition between different types of space, for example, the stairs coming out of the

subway into a busy street, or the train station into the main hall.

If you must stop to check something, to take a call, or other things, stop with your back to a wall. This will prevent people coming at you from behind.

If you notice someone approaching you from behind, slow down slightly and move to one side, towards the street, and let them pass. This also helps keep people away from your back.

If someone is approaching you head on, again make sure they have space to pass, preferring to move towards the street side, and not the buildings.

Being closer to the street gives you more options to move and create space if needed.

Look for suspicious behavior, e.g. if someone sees you and immediately takes a phone out to look at it or make a call, you should be more alert, or, if someone locks their attention on you, and holds that attention as you approach, then be on the lookout for potential attackers from the side or back.

Remember: the closer someone is to you, the more potentially dangerous they are.

At the Parking Lot

Rule: if people are on top of you, the fight is over.

Park either near the store where there are lots of people around so a would-be attacker will not be tempted to act there, or in an area where there are no cars, so an attack would stand out.

If there are cars parked in clusters, do not park near them, park at a spot without any cars.

This will prevent people hiding in between cars and jumping you, and give you the ability to see your surroundings much better.

Use the 5-25 approach for assessing your surroundings: while in the car, as you finish parking, and before you open the door, take a 360 degree look 5 yards all around. If there is nothing concerning there, then do the same 25 yards out. As you walk towards the car, keep your head up, and look 5 yards around you, and then 25 yards out. Again, situational awareness is scanning your immediate surroundings, and then farther out.

If there is anything that doesn't feel right, do not get out of the car and drive away.

If there are potential threats around your car, go back to the store or safe place. Do not go to the car. If life is in danger, call law enforcement.

If you detect a threat, try to put your car as a blocking obstacle between you and the threat. Give yourself a chance to run. Only fight if there is no other option and life is in danger.

Understand when to hand over the car keys and live or when to fight.

At the Traffic Light

Rule: don't look at your phone. Always look around, using the mirrors.

Always keep the car in gear, so you can quickly escape if needed, keep your doors locked, and windows up.

As you approach a red light, always maintain a distance from the vehicle in front so that you can escape a bad situation. As a rule of thumb if you can see the rear tires you have room to maneuver.

Avoid driving in areas you know are dangerous. Depending on where you are, sometimes it might be prudent to not stop at red lights at night. Do not break the law, but make a decision when needed, use common sense. Slow down, look at both sides, and go.

Do not get into arguments with other drivers. If you think you are at risk, drive away and go to the police. Report the incident.

Always have a phone charger in the car. Use it. Keep your phone always charged.

Remember, your safety and those of your passengers comes first. If someone is threatening you with a firearm, give them the car.

At the Office

Rule: always keep your critical items with you, not spread out in the desk, bag, or jacket.

Try to sit facing the door, not with your back to it. If that's not possible, use a little mirror to gain situational awareness.

Always have a phone charger in the office. Use it. Keep your phone always charged.

In case of a shooter or someone violent, run if possible, hide when running is not an option, and fight if there is no other way.

To Close

Remember: Establish baselines. Look for anomalies. Have a plan.

Understand what your environment looks like, what the normal is, and work towards getting a solid foundational knowledge of possible threats.

Constantly detect things deviating from the norm, paying attention to subtle changes that may indicate malicious action.

Know what to do when something goes wrong, even when it's an "unknown", have a standard operating procedure that helps initiate action.