



Smithsonian Institution

# TIPS FOR PERSONAL SAFETY

MAKE YOURSELF A TOUGHER TARGET

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Available on the **OPS Alerts Web site** at:  
<http://www.alerts.si.edu/docs/PersonalSafetyTips.pdf>

## **Remember:**

- ✓ Crime can happen to you!
- ✓ Nothing will make you safe in every situation.
- ✓ “Bad guys” don’t always look like bad guys.

## **When you’re out:**

- Be alert to your surroundings and walk with your head up.
- When wearing an iPod/earphones keep the volume at a low level so you are still alert to your surroundings.
- Carry your purse with the strap over your head and purse flat against your body.
- Don’t flash large amounts of money when you shop.
- If you see anything that makes you uncomfortable, cross the street or turn around – get out of the situation. Don’t be afraid to offend!
- Don’t get into an elevator if you feel uncomfortable.
- If you become the victim of a crime on an elevator, push all the buttons except the red button!
- Park in a well-lit area close to your destination.
- Try to walk to your car in a group.
- Always look in your car before getting in.
- Do not leave items visible in your car – not even bags or inexpensive items! If applicable, use the trunk.
- Don’t let your guard down even on public transportation – you could be a victim on the Metro or in a taxi.

## **When you’re driving:**

- Use caution when selecting a vanity tag.
- Keep your doors locked and the windows up.
- Don’t leave your purse on the seat.
- Make sure your car is in good repair and has plenty of gas.
- Whenever possible, don’t travel alone.
- Let someone know your plans and estimated arrival time.
- If your car breaks down, stay in the car and put your flashers on.
- Be suspicious of an unmarked police car or an officer in plain clothes – always ask to see identification.  
If you are still not sure, don’t be afraid to request that a uniformed officer respond as well.

### **When you're at home:**

- Keep your windows and doors locked at all times.
- Do not open the door to anyone you are not expecting and cannot positively identify.
- Use your peephole.
- Use caution when recording your answering machine message.
- Have a dog – even a small dog barking can deter a criminal because it draws attention.
- If you return home and something does not seem right, leave and call the police – do not go into your house!
- Have a light on a timer so you will never have to return to a dark house.
- Don't leave purses, money, etc. near a window.
- Stop your mail and your newspaper when you go on vacation.
- Give a neighbor you trust a key to your house and ask him/her to watch your house when you go on vacation.
- Always call the police regarding any suspicious activity.

### **When you're at work:**

- Keep your purse locked up.
- Protect your keys.
- Report suspicious persons to security. Keep the phone number of your building's security unit by your phone.
- It's okay to ask "Can I help you?" but if you suspect anything, call security.
- If you are working late, walk to your car or Metro with a co-worker or ask security to escort you.

### **If you become a victim:**

- If the attacker demands your car keys or wallet – Give it up – it's not worth your life!
- Throw the keys or wallet and RUN!
- Yell, scream and fight! Women generally lack upper body strength, so KICK.
- Yell "FIRE!" A fire affects everyone and people will listen.
- Remember that any weapon you carry can be used against you.
- If you want to carry a weapon, pepper spray is your best option – you can spray from a distance and run.
- Never get into a car, even if the attacker threatens you with a gun! Your chances of survival are greatly reduced when you are taken to a secondary site.
- If you are threatened with a gun, RUN! The chances that the shooter will hit a moving target are less than 5%. The chances that you will be shot seriously are less than 2%.
- Report all crimes! Sometimes people are reluctant to report a crime because they think it was not serious or they are embarrassed because they feel it was their fault. Reporting crime helps to prevent the criminal from victimizing another person.

**Do not go anywhere, do anything, or talk to anyone that makes you feel uncomfortable.**

**Finally ... Trust your instincts ... you have them for a reason.**