



## Madison Police Department

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### PERSONAL SAFETY GUIDELINES

#### INTRODUCTION

Incidents of violence can occur anywhere at any time. If your gut instinct tells you something is wrong, you are probably right.

This material has been compiled to help you take action to protect yourself. There is never a guarantee that you will not be assaulted, but there are things you can do to help reduce potential vulnerability.

One of your best defenses may be to rehearse in your mind what you would do during a potentially dangerous situation. This may enable you to act in a calmer manner. Acting calmer will allow you to think more clearly and concentrate on the protective behaviors techniques you have rehearsed.

#### SAFETY AT HOME

- Be aware of your surroundings. Be familiar with who is coming and going-- who does or does not belong in your neighborhood.
- Know your neighbors and learn who can be called for assistance when needed.
- Never mention to a stranger that you or your neighbor lives alone or is on vacation.
- People may be safer using only first initials and last names on mailboxes and in phone directories.
- Change locks when you move into a new residence. Make sure your doors have deadbolt locks and peepholes. Use them! Do not rely on chains.
- Check ID's when repair people, sales people, meter readers, etc., come to the door. Don't hesitate to call and check them out or refuse admittance if something feels wrong.
- If you let someone in and have second thoughts, be assertive. Tell them to leave or leave yourself.
- Pretend you are not alone by mentioning a friend or family member is asleep in the next room.
- Always pull the shades at night. This will make it difficult for someone to determine if you are alone.
- Make sure entrances, exits, garages, grounds and hallways are well lit.
- Leave outside lights on at night, or install a motion detector. Leave an interior light on in one or two rooms with the shades drawn. Leave a radio on. Use of timers is helpful, especially when you are out of town.
- If you live on the first floor of a building, you want to be sure your windows will not open more than four inches by placing vent locks in the runner. Screws can be installed in upper track of sliding glass doors so doors cannot be removed from their track.
- When using a laundry room in an apartment building, do not stay there alone.
- Instruct children and babysitters not to give out information about who is home, who is out, or for how long.
- Carefully select the message you put on answering machines. Use "we" instead of "I" or select a standard voice mail message if possible without your voices.

- Don't leave notes on your door for others or allow solicitors material to remain on your doorknob since this advertises your absence.
- If you suspect someone is in your home, don't go in. Go to a neighbors and call 911. If someone is in your house or garage, they'll have a chance to leave and avoid a confrontation.
- Always lock doors when doing yard work or spending time in the yard. If you have a portable or cellular phone, take it outside with you.
- Be careful when using computer internet or on-line services. Use caution in providing personal information. Being flooded with e-mail can be annoying; having a chat room participant show up at your door uninvited can be a terrifying experience.
- Make sure when having a garage sale you don't keep large amounts of cash unattended and lock up your home during a sale.
- Do not include your Drivers License information on your checks.

### **SAFETY ON THE STREET**

- Stay on populated well lit streets. Avoid shrubbery, dark areas near buildings and any other places an attacker might hide. Avoid shortcuts through alleys, vacant lots and other deserted places. Whenever possible, avoid walking or jogging alone--even during the day.
- Look around as you walk and be aware of your surroundings. Make it difficult for anyone to take you by surprise. Walk confidently at a steady pace.
- Avoid secluded or deserted areas and businesses (Laundromats, phone booths, isolated ATM's)
- If possible, walk near the curb or edge of the street. Watch your reflection in windows as you pass in order to see if anyone is following you.
- If you believe you are in danger, run to the nearest well lit and populated area and yell while you are running.
- Be cautious about revealing cash or credit cards.
- Try to limit the number of packages you carry.
- If you carry a handbag, hold it close to your body. "Fanny-Packs" keep your personal items close to you while keeping your hands free. Don't risk your life for your personal property.
- Don't wear headphones when you walk. They inhibit your ability to hear someone approach you.
- Never accept rides from strangers. If a driver asks directions, don't get too close to the car.
- Trust your instincts. Do not hesitate to remove yourself from the situation. Forget the rules of etiquette and social norms. Be willing to make a scene if necessary. Most rapes are not committed by strangers, but rather by subjects who know their victims. Your safety may depend on a quick and decisive reaction.
- Think twice about carrying a weapon of any kind. It can be used against you both physically and in a court of law. Weapons should only be used in order to get away from a dangerous situation. Safer alternatives to firearms or edged weapons include keys, pepper spray (OC Spray - Oleoresin Capsicum) and personal alarms that make loud noises. Keep one or two of these handy - in your hand, not at the bottom of your purse or backpack.

### **SAFETY IN YOUR CAR**

- Keep doors locked and windows rolled up at all times when driving.
- Drive on inside lanes or away from curbs on city streets. Leave one to two car lengths in front of you when stopped in traffic in case you need to pull out quickly.
- Plan your driving route so you won't be driving in a unfamiliar area.

- If you have car trouble, raise the hood and stay in your vehicle. If someone offers assistance, roll the window down just enough to talk to them. Ask them to call the police for you.
- Do not stop to help a stranger in a stalled vehicle--go to a safe place and report the stalled motorist to the police or call from a cell phone.
- Don't pick up hitchhikers.
- If someone tries to get into your car while you are in it, honk the horn and try to drive away.
- If you are being followed, don't go home. Drive to the nearest police, fire station or an open convenience store--any place that is populated.
- Try to keep your car maintained and keep your gas tank at least half full.
- Park as close to your destination as possible and in well lit areas.
- If security staff are available to walk you to your car, don't be embarrassed to use them!
- While walking up to your vehicle, look underneath. Check inside your car before getting in.
- If you leave keys with a parking attendant or at a service station, leave only the car key.
- Purchase/lease a cellular phone and keep it charged.
- Always have your keys ready to unlock the car door and enter without delay. You will appear vulnerable if you are looking for your keys as you approach your car. The best device is a remote door opener.

## **SAFETY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

### **Traveling by Bus**

- When waiting for a bus, stand near other people, if possible. Wait in well-lit areas. Stand balanced, keep your hands free and be aware of the people around you.
- Sit near the driver.
- Sit in an aisle seat so you can move easily if the need arises.
- Don't sleep. Watch your valuables.
- If you feel you are being followed, don't get off at your regular stop if it's dark and deserted. Consider a more frequently used stop or ask someone to meet you at the stop.
- If you feel in danger, make a scene! Let bystanders know what is happening and what kind of help you need. The bus driver should have access to a dispatcher who can call 911.

### **Traveling by Taxi**

- Taxis are a good way of getting around in a busy city--especially at night. Sit in the back seat of the taxi. Stay alert to the route taken. Always take note of the driver's identification card so that a report can be made if there is a problem.
- Ask the driver to wait and watch until you are safely inside your destination.
- Be very careful when traveling by taxi in foreign countries due to a high volume of robberies of tourists by taxi drivers.
- Try to travel with someone else, if possible.

### **Traveling by Plane**

- Pack lightly so you can carry your luggage without help.
- Use luggage tags with flaps so that your name and address cannot be seen. Use your initials or your destination/business address instead of your home address.
- Make your luggage very distinct looking using colorful tape or stickers.
- Zip up or close items traveling through the X-Ray Machines and WATCH IT CLOSELY when it comes out.

## **SAFETY IN PUBLIC PLACES**

### **Hotels**

- When registering, use only your first initial. Ask for a room on an upper floor near the elevator.
- Find out if security is available during the night and how to reach them.
- If you enter your room notice anything suspicious, leave immediately and call hotel security.
- Always keep your room double-locked and beware of people claiming to be hotel employees. Check with the front desk before letting an employee enter your room.
- Check that all locks on window locks are working and keep them locked.

### **Elevators**

- While waiting for an elevator, stand far enough away from the door to avoid being pushed in. Don't enter an elevator occupied by a lone stranger if you feel uncomfortable. Trust your instincts.
- Let others select their floors before you select yours. Stand near the control panel. If you are assaulted, hit the alarm button and as many other floor buttons as possible.

### **Rest Rooms**

- Check stalls before going in. If it's a one-person facility, check that no one is there before locking doors.
- Always escort your children into public restrooms.

## **SAFETY IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS**

- Watch your use of alcohol and drugs. Vulnerability increases when one is intoxicated or high.
- Attend large parties with friends you can trust. Agree to look out for one another. Try to leave with a group rather than alone or with someone you don't know well.
- When starting to date a new acquaintance, have the first few dates in a public place and arrange to meet your date there. Avoid becoming isolated with someone you don't know well.
- Always have a way home or a way out. Listen to your inner voice. If you are uncomfortable or feel at risk, leave the situation immediately. Trust your instincts. It's easier to apologize for overreacting than to pick up the pieces after you get hurt.
- As a relationship progresses, avoid becoming physically, emotionally or socially isolated from friends and family. Sexual assaults within an ongoing relationships do happen quite often (date rape).

## **SAFETY MEASURES AS PART OF A COMMUNITY**

- Call police when witnessing criminal behavior.
- Pressure the Criminal Justice System to hold offenders accountable (advocacy).
- Be willing to take a stand against violent behavior by supporting zero tolerance.
- Support the system which is helping victims to recover (volunteer).
- Support treatment programs serving abusers and victims.
- Talk to corporate individuals about policies and/or programs in the work place dealing with violence.