

47th Ward Street Safety

(Information provided by Chicago Police Dept.)



People who are described as being street smart typically do two things:

1. They make efforts to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous situations, when possible.
2. They leave dangerous situations they might encounter before things escalate.

The Mindset of Street Smarts

Trust your intuition, and act on it.

When you sense that a situation could be bad, resist the temptation to hope for the best, or to wait for some proof. Our intuition is our *internal alarm system*, and it alerts us to dangers that are not obvious, but nevertheless real.

Protect your personal space

In general, perpetrators want easy access to their potential victims. In our homes, security hardware provides a barrier to this access. On the street, attitude provides a barrier. Displaying a confident and decisive attitude can communicate that our personal space will not be violated easily.

Maintain a degree of healthy distrust.

Giving people the benefit of the doubt is commonly accepted as a standard of social politeness. However, expecting that people should earn our trust is a safer standard. Make reasoned decisions about who you will allow into your personal space, which you will provide with personal information, and with whom you will be isolated. Ask yourself first, do I really have a good reason to trust this person?

Get angry if people try to harm you.

You have the absolute right to live your life free of violence. Your anger can help you to overcome fear and has the potential to scare off an attacker.

When people express concern about safety in public places, it focuses most often on our fear of violence from strangers. However, violence from intimates or former intimates can occur in public places as well. This is domestic violence, and it is not a private matter. It is a criminal act. If you witness domestic violence, immediately call 9-1-1 to report it to the police.

Helping Others

If you witness menacing behavior that a victim cannot escape from, or an assault, call 9-1-1 and solicit help from others on the street.

Some options:

- Stay in the view of the victim so that he or she is assured they have an ally.
- Distract the perpetrator so the victim can escape.
- From a safe distance away, call out to the perpetrator that the police have been called and direct the perpetrator to back off.
- Be very cautious if you choose to physically intervene. Seriously consider the benefits and risks to both the victim and you.

Recognizing Set Ups

People who perpetrate violence on the street may distract us or bait us so we somehow stop to engage with them. They may attempt to catch us by surprise or intimidate us by using insults, abusive language, demands, movement into our personal space, or coyly asked questions. Undermine these tactics by using a combination of strategies. Always let your gut feeling be your guide to the best options for a situation.

Prepare Some Plans

Typically, people who perpetrate street violence have a plan. Any planning that we can do in anticipation of a possible threat will give us an edge. Here are two ideas:

1. Imagine some potentially threatening situations in which you might find yourself, and visualize some possible escapes. Thinking through some "what if" situations ahead of time gives us some ready-made options to draw on in time of need, and helps keep us out of denial when threatened.
2. Identify a safe haven in the neighborhoods that you frequent, and when you travel in unfamiliar neighborhoods, too. Safe havens are refuges where we can use a telephone, wait out a volatile situation, or solicit help from others. Ideal safe havens are small businesses in which it is easy to identify the person in charge, and which have entrances that can be locked quickly. Once inside, clearly communicate what is causing you fear, and what you need.

Developing Your Skills

Practicing in a safe environment is a great way to prepare for situations we encounter.

Self-defense classes, training in assertive confrontation skills, and practice with friends all help enhance our survival skills.

Physical Strategies

- Breathe! It clears the head and helps calm the nerves.
- Keep moving.
- Look around as you walk or wait on the street. Checking out what is happening on each side of you makes you appear difficult to catch by surprise.
- Take up extra space when sitting and standing. It defines the physical boundaries that you will protect.
- Make brief eye contact, selectively. It communicates that others are seen, that we belong in a space, and that we are not easily intimidated. To avoid sending a mixed message, keep your face neutral, not glaring or smiling. Break eye contact by looking to the side. Avoid eye contact with those who you believe could misinterpret it as a challenge, or as an invitation into your space.

Verbal Strategies

- Typically, perpetrators of violence do not expect us to verbalize any distrust of them. A variety of verbal strategies can help send a message that you are not easily intimidated. A neutral glance in the direction of a threat can send the same message.
- Deception & distraction can buy some time or create an opening for escape.
- Negotiation can alter perpetrators demands or create an opening for escape.
- Assertively saying "NO" communicates our unwillingness to comply with demands.
- Naming the offensive behavior can communicate that we recognize bad intent.
- Directives/commands can shock the perpetrator and make us appear in control.
- Yelling can send a message that we are not an easy target, and can attract attention.

If you have any questions about crime in your area or need more information, please contact the CAPS office in your local police district. For emergencies, always dial 9-1-1.

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