

Personal Safety

Awareness & Tips



Safety is Everyone's
Responsibility

Take Charge of Yours!

INTRODUCTION



How “Working Alone” is Organized

The “Working Alone” Resource Guide has been developed to focus on major safety themes. Each theme describes the issue and some common sense strategies for minimizing risk when you find yourselves in a working alone situation.

- Be **Alert** - Look Around
- Be **Ready** - Have a Plan
- Be **Safe** - When You Travel
- Be **Responsible** - What You Can Do

The “Working Alone” Resource Guide was developed in partnership between WRHA Personal Safety Professionals and the Winnipeg Police Service.

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BE ALERT - LOOK AROUND



Being alert really means two different things: what you can **see** and how you **feel**:

WHAT YOU CAN SEE: as you make your visits -

- Do you notice your surroundings and avoid dark alleys and entranceways?
- Do you know who is around and who belongs there?
- Do you know notice the people in the neighborhood you're visiting? Would you notice if someone was following you? Do you know your clients' homes and potential escape routes if you ever had to leave quickly?

HOW YOU FEEL: can I trust my feelings.....YES!

- Sometimes our feelings alert us long before we can actually see the danger; if you sense that something is wrong or you feel uncomfortable, leave the home or neighborhood immediately and move to a safe location.
- Our feelings can alert us both to dangerous surroundings or people.
- When in doubt then, **TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS** - leave and talk to your supervisor; explain to them what triggered your feelings. **YOUR SUPERVISOR WILL SUPPORT YOU.**



BE ALERT - Checklist

	Yes	No
Do I know who is around me and who belongs (when I visit my client)?		
Are building/home entrances well lit?		
Have I noticed strangers lurking outside of the home/building I'm entering?		
Am I familiar with my surroundings (ie. neighborhoods, buildings/homes)? Has anything changed since my last visit?		
Am I aware of potential hiding places (threats) such as entranceways, stairwells, bushes etc.		
Do I notice who might be crossing the street in front of/behind me for no reason or intoxicated persons carrying potential weapons?		
Are there situations I feel very uncomfortable being in (think about it...what is it that makes me feel uncomfortable)?		
Have I noted potential escape routes and any obstacles?		
Do I trust my instincts/feelings?		
If someone calls or arrives unexpectedly		

BE READY - HAVE A PLAN



After we've had an opportunity to 'look around' and determine what may or may not be dangerous, we have the information we need to begin developing a plan. We can't prevent every dangerous situation from happening but if we know what might be dangerous when working alone, we can develop a plan that may prevent or make the situation less dangerous for ourselves.

What Does a Good Plan Look Like?

Although each plan will look different, a good Working Alone safety plan is based on:

- being **alert** to my surroundings, and identifying potential dangers;
- working with my supervisor to develop a **safety plan**;
- **knowing how to be safe** when I'm traveling; and
- **being responsible** for my own safety.

With Your Supervisor - Develop a Plan

1. Talk to your supervisor
2. **Log and Report** - both verbally and in writing
3. **Problem Solve** - review all facts and find appropriate solutions
4. **Develop** - a Safety Plan together
5. **Follow-up** - any problem areas with your Workplace Safety Committee





**If someone calls or arrives unexpectedly,
NEVER INDICATE YOU'RE ALONE.**



BE READY - Checklist

	Yes	No
Do I use the 'Buddy System' (someone who knows where I am at all times)?		
Do I have a plan for how I can get help if I encounter difficulty?		
Do my co-workers/supervisor and client(s) know when to expect me?		
Do I call ahead to my client's home to alert them of my arrival time or any delays?		
Do I arrange for someone to watch for me (at my arrival time)? Do they know what to do if I don't arrive as planned?		
If my plans change (ie. I'm delayed) do I contact people who need to know?		
Do I know how I'd respond in certain (dangerous) situations?		
Do I discuss log and/or report any safety concerns I have with my supervisor as soon as I become aware of potential problems/dangers?		
Do I develop a safety plan with my supervisor.		
Do I include a 'check-in' process as part of my safety plan and when my timelines change, do I alert my 'check-in' contact?		
Do I know the AFTER-HOURS phone number if I feel unsafe?		
Do I lock doors after I reach the home or building I'm going to?		
Do I notify my supervisor or security personnel about any suspicious people?		



**If you feel you're in danger at any time....
leave, go to a safe location and CALL 911 for help.**

BE SAFE - WHEN YOU TRAVEL



Whether you are walking or relying on some form of transportation (either private or public) to do our work, there are many things we can think about and plan for when working alone that can make our work safer.

As You Travel...Plan a Safe Route

As you travel....**BE ALERT!** Plan for the safest route possible and as much as possible, stay on busy, well-lit streets where you'll find more people present. Walk on sidewalks (preferably in the middle of the sidewalk) and avoid the temptation to take short-cuts to your destination through alleyways, parks or parking lots where there may be fewer people and poorer lighting. Cross the street, if necessary for better lighting.



As You Travel...Street Smarts

BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT...there are some common-sense things you can do as part of your plan to make yourself and your situation safer. A good rule of thumb?



If you must take money, take only small amounts in a small bag that can be hidden under clothing (e.g. belt-pack, fanny pack, wallet). Other valuables should be kept separate from your bag.

Straps should be wrapped around the bag and tucked under your arm; otherwise, you could be injured if a robber attempts to steal your bag and the strap is around your wrist or neck.

IF CONFRONTED.... However, there may be times when you are unable to avoid a confrontation with a stranger. When this happens:

- **NEVER** confront a stranger/thief.
- **ALWAYS** cooperate with their demands for your money/belongings
- **INFORM** them of possible surprises (ie. someone on the way etc.)
- **LET THEM GO** - if someone grabs for your things.

Most assailants just want money; nothing is so valuable that you should compromise your own safety.

As You Travel...Vehicle Safety

If you use a vehicle for work, how often do you follow these safety practices (HINT) - you want to aim for 'always'.



BE SAFE - Checklist

	Never	Some times	Always
I keep my gas tank at least ¼ full.			
When I'm driving, all of my doors are locked.			
I keep a basic survival kit in my car.			
I make sure there is nothing in the vehicle with identifying information (including driver registration) or I remove it when I leave the vehicle. *			
My keys are not labeled or identified.			
I have key(s) ready before I leave my vehicle/ building I can quickly enter my vehicle/building.			
I check under/inside the vehicle before I open the doors.			
I put all valuables in the trunk (and out of view).			
I use an anti-theft deterrent/steering wheel lock.			

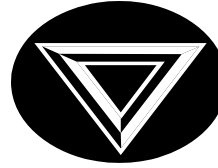


You do not need to keep your VEHICLE REGISTRATION in your vehicle - you can keep the registration in a safe place outside of the vehicle and give each driver a photocopy for their wallets - a photocopy is acceptable to police when asked to produce it.

IF YOU'RE FOLLOWED - if you believe you're being followed, drive to an open business, police station, hospital emergency room or 24 hour business (ie. donut shop).

IF YOU'RE VEHICLE BREAKS DOWN...

- Do NOT leave the vehicle.
- Lock your vehicle doors/windows up.
- Put your emergency/four-way flashers on.
- Use your cell-phone and call for help.
- If you have one, use "Call Police" sign - this informs passing motorists to request help (available at many stores, including Canadian Tire)
- If someone approaches your vehicle to help, open window down only enough to ask them to call for help - do not exit your vehicle.



IF YOU'RE PARKING YOUR VEHICLE...

- Park in well-lit and busy areas whether parking on the street, in a parking lot or parkade; if using a parking lot/parkade, park near entrances/exits.
- Avoid hiding extra keys in/under vehicles (thieves know where to look).
- When you return to the vehicle, wait until you are behind the wheel before starting.
- When carrying children and groceries to your vehicle, place children in vehicle first and then load groceries.
- Never leave your purse/wallet unattended in a shopping cart while loading groceries/children into your vehicle.

TAXIS: always sit in the back seat of the taxi.

SECURITY THAT WORKS...



Many newer vehicles come equipped with 'panic' buttons built into the key - pushing the button usually activates the vehicle horn and/or causes the signal and headlights to flash and draws attention to your vehicle. If you don't have this option:

- **Anti-Theft Steering Wheel Locks** - is a visible deterrent and decreases chance of vehicle theft.
- **Vehicle Alarms** - usually include a warning sticker on the window/dashboard which acts as a visible deterrent to a thief; alarms decrease the risk of vehicle break-ins and increases the opportunity to catch thieves.
- **Ignition Switch Immobilizers** - usually invisible (installed under the hood or dashboard) and prevent the car from being stolen (but does not prevent a car from break-in).
- **Combat Auto Theft (CAT) Sticker** - is a visible warning and deterrent. Vehicles displaying this vehicle provide police with an alert to stop your vehicle if it's observed being driven between 01:00 and 05:00 a.m.

PUBLIC TRANSIT SAFETY...



BUS STOPS: Use convenient, well-lit (and if possible) busy bus stops whenever possible.

- If possible, try not to be alone at bus stops.
- Carry a current bus schedule - avoid long waiting periods at bus stops and arrive just before the bus is due.
- Know where you are going and where your transfer point is.

SEATING: Look around when you get on the bus; if possible, sit as close to the front and the driver as possible; assess who to sit near...or not!

- If someone is threatening or harassing you, advise the driver (all buses are radio-equipped and the dispatcher may alert police).

EXITING THE BUS: if possible, arrange to have someone meet you at your stop.

- Pay attention to your surroundings when exiting the bus.
- Use "Request Stop" to exit in between stops if you feel safer (tell the bus driver).
- Be alert to who gets on/off the bus with you - delay your stop if you feel uncomfortable....alert the bus driver.



EMERGENCY FARE ENVELOPES are available if you are out walking and find yourself feeling uncomfortable about your safety, and you don't have bus fare with you.

(this enables you to use the bus service and mail the fare in later).

BE RESPONSIBLE - WHAT YOU CAN DO



While we know we can't control every situation we find ourselves in, we can plan for and remind ourselves of some basic safety principles that may come in handy as we work....

PRIVACY

- Don't engage in conversation with people you don't know.
- Keep your personal information private (don't disclose personal information to a stranger or client), regardless of how important the person who is asking may seem, or reports to be.



**Share information only on a
NEED TO KNOW
basis.**

- If asked for personal information, refer any requests to your Supervisor.
- Carry only necessary identification; keep it on you in a secure place.
- Use first name only; never disclose your address, routines, vacation plans.

APPEARANCE

- Avoid restrictive clothing or 'flashy' jewelry (ie. anything that would draw attention to you); keep necklaces inside clothing and turn gem rings inward.
- Review what you take with you - minimize wherever possible.



**If you don't need it,
don't take it or wear it.**

Fighting Back - Should I or Shouldn't I?

IF ATTACKED...the choice of whether or not to physically resist and attack can only be made by you. If you choose to take action:

- ACT! Summon help from bystanders (don't freeze)
- Be ready to take action and get away.
- Attract attention to yourself (scream) - cause as much commotion as possible.
- Run to the nearest home/business.
- Do NOT go with your assailant (you are much more likely to be hurt if you do).
- Use whatever you have as a weapon (umbrella, keys, purse, car steering wheel lock/club) along with your hands, feet, knees.

Fighting Back - Sprays

Police say sprays (ie. bear spray) **DON'T WORK** because...

- Wind direction, cold temperatures and malfunction are all things that can turn your advantage and be used against you.
- Bear spray is illegal if used on humans and may result in criminal charges, especially if it's used for the wrong reason.

But...don't police use pepper spray?

- They do; however, the spray they use is significantly more potent than what you can buy in any hunting-supply store. Police also undergo rigorous training, are well trained in using sprays and understand its limitations and challenges.

Some of the **CHALLENGES** of using sprays include:

- Deciding who is a potential risk.
- Making the conscious decisions of spraying only when attacked (if you spray only when attacked it may be too late and you may be equally affected by the spray).
- Chasing the assailant, spraying and running into the spray-cloud.
- The risk of the assailant using the spray on you.

Fighting Back - Personal Alarms

Police say alarms **WORK IF USED PROPERLY**

WHAT ARE THEY?

- Personal alarms come in many styles; one common version looks like a pager or a (computer) mouse; it has a small horn which, when activated by the removal of a pin with a strap, shrieks at ear-piercing levels or, makes a high-pitched (about 115 dB*) disturbing sound. The device will continue to sound for about 35 seconds.
 - 115 dB is a reading of sound pressure is at the limit of what the human ear can take....it causes discomfort.

WHAT DOES IT DO FOR YOU?

- Personal alarms attract attention and give you an opportunity for escape; to run away as fast as you possibly can (in the meantime, the attacker has to decide whether to continue their attack, try and stomp on the device to try to stop the alarm.... or run).

HOW TO USE A PERSONAL ALARM DEVICE

- Pull the pin and throw the alarm-device away from you, off to the side (the loud, disturbing noise will draw public attention, which is not what an attacker wants as the public/by-standers will be much more able to identify them).