

# Personal Safety

Assault can happen anywhere even in your own home. To protect yourself, be aware of places or situations that put you at risk.

## In your home

Get to know your neighbours. Make arrangements to keep an eye on each other's homes or apartments when away.

Draw drapes or close blinds after dark.

Ensure that your outside doors and door frames are sturdy.

Install security-rated locks (i.e. deadbolts rather than bathroom door locks) on doors and windows.

Install a peep-hole in your door or have a screen door as a barrier. Identify visitors before opening your door and don't open your door to strangers.

If a stranger asks to use your phone, offer to make the call yourself.

List only your initials and last name on the mailbox or in the telephone book. Don't list your first name or indicate Mr., Mrs., Ms. or Miss.

Never give personal information to telephone solicitors or wrong number callers.

Have emergency telephone numbers on or near your phone.

Make sure that all entrances are

well lit.

Have your keys ready as you approach the door. Don't hide spare keys.

Be aware of your surroundings and evaluate your situation so you can make wise decisions about your safety. Stay alert in laundry rooms, parking garages, elevators and dark or secluded streets.

## In your vehicle

Keep your vehicle locked when it's parked and when you are driving.

Have your keys ready when approaching your parked car. Check to make sure no one is hiding inside.

If you are followed, drive to a busy public area such as a fire hall or police station. Try to note the licence number of the car.

Park in well-lit areas. Be observant, so you can assess your surroundings and safety, especially in parking garages.

Don't leave car registration and insurance documents in your vehicle. They show your address and other personal information.

Keep your garage door opener out of sight until you need it. Thieves can use it to get into your home.

Don't hide spare keys under the hood, the bumpers or anywhere else on the car.

Keep your vehicle in good work-

ing order to avoid breakdowns.

If your vehicle breaks down, raise the hood and switch on the hazard lights. If you feel the situation could be dangerous, stay inside with the windows up and the doors locked. If somebody offers help, assess your situation to see if it is safe to accept assistance. Is the helper another motorist with a family or a lone driver? If you feel unsafe, ask the helper to call for assistance.

Help stranded motorists by phoning for assistance.

## In your community

In your community plan your route ahead of time before going for a walk.

Be assertive when walking. Attackers seek victims who appear intimidated or vulnerable.

Walk with a companion if you feel that being alone may put you at risk. Observe your surroundings. If you're hesitant about rounding a corner or walking down a certain street, follow your instincts.

Stay on busier, well-lit streets. Avoid dark or concealed areas and never assume parked cars are empty.

Don't overload yourself with parcels. These may block your view or reduce your mobility.

If you are followed, quickly assess your options. Can you run or change directions? Are there people nearby, a house or an open business

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or "rape." This is more likely to bring a response from others and confuse the attacker. Consider carrying a police whistle. The noise will attract attention and scare most attackers.

To confuse the attacker, you can faint, urinate, vomit or fake a heart attack.

Sometimes physical resistance may be effective. Immediate and forceful resistance may throw the attacker off-guard and allow you time to escape. A self-defence course may help, but it should not be considered your only resource.

Common items such as keys, umbrellas and bags can be used as weapons. However, weapons can be used against you or make the attacker more violent.

## If it happens

If you are assaulted, you will face a number of painful emotions. Victims often feel fear, confusion, anger, embarrassment, disgust and guilt. It is important to remember that you are not to blame. The only guilty party is your assailant.

## Here's what to do immediately after an assault:

Call the police - prompt reporting will help them obtain evidence, and they will help you get the assistance you need. If you feel uncomfortable, ask that a friend or loved one be with you.

Don't bathe, change or dispose of your clothes. Such actions may destroy evidence that could convict your attacker.

Don't consume any alcohol, drugs or medication.

Go to the hospital for a medical examination. You will be asked to give your name, age and details of the assault. You may ask that a friend be with you throughout the physical examination.

You may also want to call a sexual assault centre. Trained counselors can provide you with emotional support.

Write down everything you can remember about the incident as soon as possible. This information could be vital and should be kept for court evidence. Use the following checklist to record all you can about your assailant.

### Suspect identity chart

- Age, height, weight
- Type of hair, colour, cut,
- Eyes, eyeglasses
- Beard, moustache
- Visible scars
- Complexion, Shoes
- Weapon . Shirt, coat, trousers
- Method of escape/direction
- Licence plate
- Vehicle description

If your case goes to court (not all do), you will be treated as a witness for the Crown. This may involve one

or more meetings with a Crown attorney. You may have someone with you during these interviews.

Your case may take several months to go to court.

You may also consider a civil lawsuit, which can be started before or after criminal proceedings. Obtain legal advice if you wish to pursue this course of action.

## You are not alone

Family or friends may be eager and able to help. There are also many trained professionals who can offer emotional support and counselling. Know that help is available. You do not have to deal with assault alone.