

SAFETY GUIDE FOR WOMEN

Personal safety is a widespread concern for women. This guide offers practical tips and strategies to help you stay safe in different scenarios. By learning key information, you can reduce risks and feel more secure.

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Life Culture



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INTRODUCTION

The seeds for this safety guide were planted after my daughter and her friend had a very scary experience. They went to a local coffee shop to study. While there, two men began to watch, record, and take pictures of them. Feeling uncomfortable, they decided to leave.

When they got outside the restaurant, they realized one of the men had gotten up to follow them, so they began running to their vehicle. The man ran after them. The girls got into their vehicle and locked the doors and began to drive away as fast as possible. However, the man had run back to his vehicle and he began to chase them through the streets of our city. The girls called 911, who told them to drive directly to the police station. It was only when they got to the police station that the man drove off.

My daughter's experience got me thinking about other scary situations that women I know have experienced. My aunt was mugged at knife-point in a parking garage. My sister was waiting at a bus stop when a man exposed himself to her. I was jogging early one morning when a vehicle began to follow me and I ended up having to hide in someone's yard.

So many women I have talked to have their own stories of where their personal safety was at risk.

It shouldn't be this way.

While we work towards a world that *is* safe for women, we created this safety guide to help women *be* safe in the meantime. This guide is intended to help women navigate daily life with confidence and security. I hope you find it a valuable resource.

Sincerely,



Susan Penner
Executive Director
Life Culture Canada

Personal safety is a widespread concern for women. This guide offers practical tips and strategies to help you stay safe in different scenarios. By learning key information, you can lower risks and feel more secure. Remember, personal safety isn't about living in fear; it's about being prepared and aware so you can live freely and more confidently.

BE CONFIDENT

What does confidence have to do with safety? **Everything!** Studies show that predators are attracted to external displays of vulnerability and use body language to judge whether or not someone is an easy target. Women who carry and present themselves with confident body language are significantly less likely to be targeted.

● Walk With Purpose

- When you walk, stand with your shoulders back and your head up. Keep your arms at your side so they can swing naturally. Take wide strides with your legs and look ahead and not at the ground. Carry yourself like you know where you are going, like people are waiting for you, and like you are in charge. Walking confidently tells a predator that you are assertive and that you are more likely to stand up for yourself.

● Make Eye Contact

- Eye contact is a sign of confidence. Making brief eye contact with people you pass tells them that you noticed them, you're looking around, and you're not afraid of confrontation.

● Trust Your Instincts

- Our intuition is often our first warning sign that something is not right. It is essential to listen to these feelings and act, whether avoiding a particular path, ending a conversation, or seeking a safer environment.

SAFETY AT HOME

- Lock your doors and windows.
- Identify who is at the door before opening it.
- Install a motion light and security system.



WHEN GOING TO YOUR CAR

- Observe your vehicle from a distance. If there is someone loitering around it, if a van or truck with tinted windows is parked beside it, or if you feel uneasy, do not approach your vehicle. Find security personnel, a mature couple, or call someone you know to walk you to your vehicle.
- Have your key ready. When walking to your car, have your key out and ready to go before exiting the building – that way you do not have to dig in your purse when standing by your car. Carry your key between your fingers as an extra safety measure.
- Look in your backseat before getting in.
- Lock your doors once inside your car before you start it, check your phone, play music, or anything else.
- If followed or chased while driving, call 911 and drive to the nearest police station.

ONLINE SAFETY TIPS

- Limit the amount you share about yourself on social media sites and check your privacy settings. Don't post about daily routines, vacations, locations, or personal contact information.
- Restrict your social media to friends and people you know.
- Report any stalking activity to site administrators.

WHEN GOING OUT



Bring Your Phone

- Make sure you have your phone and that it is charged before leaving.

Share Where You Are

- Keep a trusted person informed of your whereabouts. This is especially important when going somewhere new or meeting someone new.

Don't Take Shortcuts

- Always take the path with the most people on it. Don't try to save time by taking back roads or alley ways.

Stay Aware

- Continually scan your environment for potential threats or unusual activities. Texting or listening to loud music can significantly reduce your awareness.

Buddy Up

- Avoid walking alone, especially in the dark.
- If alone, talk, or pretend to talk, on the phone.

Stay in Well-Lit Areas

- Well-lit areas improve visibility, allowing you to see dangers and help others to see you. Attackers prefer shadows and dark to commit their crime without witnesses.

Hold Your Keys

- When walking, hold your keys between your fingers to turn them into an impromptu weapon if needed.

Watch Your Drink

- Always watch your drink being poured, never leave it unattended, and don't accept drinks from acquaintances or strangers.

Seek Help

- If you feel scared, stay in a public place and ask security or a mature couple for help. Or call family or friends to come and escort you home.

Take Self-Defence

- Self-defence classes focus on techniques that maximize strengths against attackers. They also instill confidence, making women feel more secure and less like potential victims.

IF ATTACKED

1. MAKE NOISE. One of the most important things you can do if you are attacked is make a lot of noise. Noise attracts attention, which is the last thing an attacker wants. No matter what they say, never stop yelling and screaming as loud as you can. Yell "HELP" or "KIDNAPPER" or "FIRE." Just keep making as much noise as possible.

2. FIGHT BACK. Do everything in your power to fight back with punches, kicks, eye pokes, bites, and scratches. *The highest priority is to not get taken to a secondary location.* The more you fight back, the harder you make it for your attacker, raising the chances that they will give up and run away. So fight and fight hard!

3. DO NOT GET TO THE SECOND LOCATION. Statistics show that you are more likely to survive by doing everything you can to get away from your attacker and not cooperating with them, than by going to a secondary location. *Do anything you can to prevent being taken to a secondary location.* Thrash, try and grab the attacker's keys and throw them as far as possible. Try and kick the vehicle door or trunk to damage it. Delay being put into a vehicle as long as you possibly can. If you get away, run in the opposite direction that the vehicle is facing. If the attacker is making you drive, get into an accident on purpose – drive into a bollard, a tree, or another vehicle.

4. NEVER COOPERATE. Make your attacker know that this will be extremely hard for them. Tear the car apart, yell constantly, attack them in the car, kick the seat, bite, and scratch. You want them to decide that you are too risky and too much work to abduct. We know this is scary and it is natural to fear making them mad. However, you are more likely to survive by doing everything you can to get away from your attacker and not cooperating with them, than by going to a secondary location.

5. IF FORCED INTO THE TRUNK OF A VEHICLE. Look for a white escape handle on the trunk door that will open it from the inside. Most new cars have this for that reason. If you can, kick the brake lights out and wave your hand outside of the car as aggressively as you can. Try to find wires and disconnect them by tearing them out. You are likely to disconnect the brake lights, which will signal to other cars and police that something is wrong, bringing attention to the car.

IF STALKED

Validate Your Experience

- Being targeted by a stalker is one of the scariest and most unsettling feelings. It's normal to try and rationalize or convince yourself it isn't happening. Victims of stalking often downplay the stalker's behavior, but stalking poses a real threat of harm. Your safety is paramount.

Let People Know

- While it may be uncomfortable, inform those around you of what's going on. Tell your family and friends to watch for a certain person or car, ask coworkers not to give out your schedule or answer questions about you. Share your location on your phone with someone you trust for safety purposes.

Document the Evidence

- Do not acknowledge your stalker, but keep a running log of every attempt to reach you. Screen shot, save, and download all forms of contact. If you see them near you, take pictures. If they are reaching out to others about you, document it. Every single piece of data helps build a picture that they are engaging in harmful, obsessive behavior. The more information you can collect, the better.

Protect Your Privacy

- Increase security on your phone, computer, and social media. Double-check that you don't have any unnecessary apps sharing your location, make your accounts private, remove unknown connections on social media, close off webcam access on your computer, and share as little private information as possible.
- Check your home and car. You can use an app to scan your house for recording or surveillance devices and use your phone's Bluetooth to check for a tracker on your car.

Report it to the Police

- As soon as possible, file a police report and update it regularly with any new attempts by the stalker. While law enforcement has limited recourse unless a threat is made, any paper trail helps. Even if you run into barriers, keep pressing on. Don't let the police turn you away. If they are not responsive to you, document that and go to a different department.

Seek Help

- Build a support network with counselling, victim's support services, and family and friends. Being stalked is traumatic. Professional services can help in the healing process.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS UNDERREPORTED

Statistics related to sexual assault and violence against women are usually based on incidents that are formally reported to police.

However, most cases of such violence are not reported. This high level of under-reporting shows that statistical reports underestimate the prevalence of sexual violence and the true extent of the problem.

- Fewer than one in ten sexual assaults are reported to police, due to feelings of humiliation or the fear of being revictimized in the legal process¹
- Young women experience the highest rates of sexual violence in Canada. The police-reported rate of sexual assault against women aged 18 to 24 is twice the rate for women aged 25 to 34, and four times the rate for women between 35 and 44.²

- One in 17 women will be raped at some point in their life.³ One in five will experience sexual assault.
- More than 80% of rapes on college and university campuses are by someone known to the victim, with half of these incidents occurring on dates.⁴ **Date rape is the most under-reported crime in Canada.**⁵
- One in three women will be stalked, with stalkers being known by their victims in over two-thirds of cases.

In nearly all cases of sexual violence against women, the abusers are male and the effects of sexual violence go far beyond physical injuries. The long-term effects on women's mental health and well-being can be very serious. It is important to report assaults and to get professional help to heal and recover.

Ensuring women's safety is crucial. By being informed, following basic safety tips, and staying alert, women can reduce risks and move through their daily lives with confidence.

1. Statistics Canada

2. Statistics Canada

3. Rape Victims Support Network

4. Canadian Federation of Students

5. Statistics Canada

6. Stalking Prevention Awareness and Resource Center

A NOTE TO MEN

Improving the personal safety of women requires proactive engagement and commitment from men. It is crucial that men take action in creating a safer society for women. Some of the ways you can do this are to:

● Educate Yourself

- Learn about the safety concerns women face. Understand how pervasive these issues are and how harmful they are to women. Listen to women when they share their experiences.

● Be a Role Model

- Demonstrate respect for women in all your interactions and relationships. Teach boys and young men how to build healthy and respectful attitudes towards women.

● Intervene

- Learn how to safely intervene in situations where a woman's personal safety is at risk.

● Practice Consent

- Make sure all your sexual and intimate interactions are based on clear and continuous consent, including in marriage.

● Be a Voice to Other Men

- Typically, men who are perpetrators tend not to listen to or respect the experiences of women, but they listen to other men. If men speak up, there is a greater chance men will respond. It is crucial that men who are concerned about the safety of women be a voice to the men in their spheres of influence.

● **Don't Watch Pornography**

- Research shows that frequent porn watchers are more likely to sexually objectify and dehumanize women, more likely to express an intent to rape, less likely to intervene during a sexual assault, more likely to victim-blame survivors of sexual violence, more likely to support violence against women, more likely to forward sexts without consent, and more likely to commit actual acts of sexual violence.

● **Avoid Victim-Blaming**

- Victim-blaming occurs when the victim of a crime or harmful act is held entirely or partially responsible for the wrong that has been done to them. This includes things like asking why the victim was in a certain place, wearing certain clothes, or acting in a certain way. Shifting focus away from the perpetrator's actions and questioning the victim's behaviour implies that the victim had control over the situation and could have prevented the crime, diminishing the seriousness of the perpetrator's actions.

● **Advocate for Protective Policies**

- Protective policies ensure that women have legal recourse when their personal safety is violated. Men hold significant influence in many spheres, and their support can drive substantial change in legislative and judicial processes.

Men, your role in ensuring the safety of women is crucial. Simple acts, like listening to women's experiences, promoting respectful behaviour, and advocating for protective policies, can make a significant difference. Together we can cultivate a society where women are safe!



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or by following the QR Code.

