

PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS

Fear of crime, particularly the fear of becoming a victim of violent crime, is more often than not based on perception rather than reality. Reports of violent crime are prevalent in the media, fueling the perception that violent crime is pervasive throughout our communities. The reality is far different.

After peaking in the early 1980's, the statistics related to violent crime- murder, rape, robbery and assaults- dropped dramatically in the following two decades for persons of every gender, race, national origin, and income level. Despite recent scattered spikes in violent crime statistics in specific areas or cities, the rate of violent crime still remains at historically low levels.

But that does little to ease the fear of violent crime based on perceptions. Edgewater's rate of violent crime is extremely low and has been for some time. For the Edgewater Police Department to be successful in keeping that rate of violent crime so low, everyone in our community needs to work with us by being careful, being vigilant and taking common sense precautions in safeguarding their personal safety.

Walk confidently and assertively, remaining alert to your surroundings and taking notice of anyone who passes you or who is behind you. Awareness of your surroundings and having a plan for responding to a threat are probably the two most important elements in personal safety. Try not to walk or jog early in the morning or late at night when it is dark and the streets or paths are more likely to be deserted; instead, walk or jog in well-lighted areas and try to have a companion with you. If you must walk in dark or deserted neighborhoods, walk down the middle of the street if the lack of vehicular traffic allows you to do that safely.

Avoid walking or jogging close to bushes, alleys, and any area that might offer someone a place of concealment. If a vehicle drives slowly along side you, or if the occupants of a vehicle bother you or attempt to engage you in conversation or ask directions, reply from a distance. Never get too close to the vehicle. If the occupants of the vehicle continue to follow or bother you, cross the street and walk or run in the opposite direction.

If you think someone is following you, turn around and check. Switch directions or cross the street. If you are still being followed, walk or run to the nearest lighted house or place of business. If you feel you are in danger, don't be afraid to make as much noise as possible by screaming for help and running. Sometimes yelling "Fire!" as a last resort has more impact in attracting attention and help.

Wear clothes and shoes that give you freedom of movement. Carry a whistle or personal safety device. If you carry a purse, hold it close to your body. Keep your wallet in a front or buttoned hip pocket. Carry as little cash as possible, only the money you will likely need on a particular day. Don't display your cash or other inviting targets like pagers, cell phones, hand-held electronic games, or expensive jewelry or clothing.

Don't overburden yourself with bags or packages that might hinder your ability to run or protect yourself. If you are loading your vehicle, take several loads to the vehicle if necessary.

Try to park in well-lighted areas with good visibility and close to walkways, stores, and other people. Always lock the vehicle doors and take the keys when you leave your vehicle, even if only for a few minutes and even in your own driveway. Never leave your vehicle motor running when you are not in your vehicle. Don't leave valuable items clearly visible inside your vehicle.

Make sure you have your key out and readily available as you approach your vehicle when returning to it. Do everything you can to keep a stranger from getting into your vehicle or to keep a stranger from forcing you into another vehicle. Check the backseat of your vehicle before you enter the vehicle just in case someone has managed to get into your vehicle and is trying to hide.

If you notice someone you think is following you when you are driving, drive immediately to the nearest busy, brightly lighted area such as a gas station, fast food store, or a fire station. Do not continue to drive to your original destination and do not drive home. Write down the license plate, make, model, and color of the vehicle. Call "911" immediately. If the vehicle leaves the area, provide a direction of travel to the "911" operator.

Most importantly, if you are unsuccessful in avoiding a robbery or assault and someone tries to rob you, giving up your property may be your best chance to survive the attack. Property can be replaced. Don't give up your life. If you decide instead to resist or fight your attacker, remember that is your decision. That decision must be made based on how you believe your attacker will respond if you resist or fight. You may be successful in resisting or fighting. Or you may provoke a more violent response from your attacker. Only you are in the very difficult and very lonely position of weighing those options. If you resist or fight, be creative. Use anything, any object, or any tactic that you think will help you. You must be willing to do or use anything to survive once you make that decision to resist or fight. You must be fully committed not only physically but mentally to survive through any means.

The above information was gathered from the Santa Clara Police Department in California and the National Crime Prevention Council. If you would like additional information regarding personal safety, the National Crime Prevention Council has a wealth of information on its website at www.ncpc.org or you may contact the Edgewater Police Department at 303-235-0500.

Revised 08/28/2013