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A Violent Crime is Committed Every 15 Seconds:

No one ever believes that he/she will become the victim of a violent crime. Statistics though can't be ignored. Someone in the United States is murdered every 20 minutes.....and there are 30 to 50 serial killers in the U. S. at any one time, according to the FBI. Here's how to protect yourself in an emergency:

Best Defense:

Carry a cell phone and preprogram it to dial the police emergency number, usually 911, but it could be a different number. A cell phone shows that you are prepared---and criminals avoid prepared targets.

When you suspect a situation might be dangerous immediately call for help. If you hit the preprogrammed 911 button and can't talk, the police might still be able to find you. Many police departments have electronic locators.

If you don't have a cell phone, fake it. Reach into your purse or pocket and pull out your compact or wallet. Cup it in your hand, put it to your ear and pretend you're talking. If the criminal thinks that you are calling for help, he/she may leave you alone.

Pepper spray, mace or a weapon may get you into trouble. Sometimes they can be poor defense. You won't have time to look for it if you're caught off guard. Even if you do try to use it, the criminal may be able to withstand the weapon and turn it on you.

If You're Approached:

Planning is vital. Nearly everyone without a plan hesitates and loses the first critical seconds that he needs to escape. Result: The victim is at the mercy of his assailant.

If you're confronted by an armed person—whether you're male or female, old or young—try to escape. Don't argue or plead with your assailant. Take out your wallet and drop it on the ground. Set down your purse. Take off

your watch or jewelry. Then run, making as much noise as you can to attract attention. Your assailant most likely is a robber not a killer. If he wanted to kill you, he would have done it at first. He probably will grab the goods and make his escape. Even if he has a gun, he probably won't shoot and if he does shoot, chances are that he may be too stressed to aim properly.

If a stranger tells you to get in a car---don't. Do all you can to resist. Every violent criminal says, "Do what I say, and I promise I won't hurt you." Don't believe it. Once a criminal decides to move you, he is no longer just a robber. He has something else in mind, probably rape or murder.

If he grabs you, you probably won't be able to kick or punch him. Instead gouge out his eyes. Many criminals are high on drugs or alcohol. Unless you cause severe pain, he might not feel it or he might be able to withstand it. If you can't reach his eyes, bite him as hard as you can---he will let go. When he loosens his grip, pull free and run. Yell, "Fire" not "help!" It attracts more attention.

If you are locked in a car trunk, kick out the taillights, stick your arm out the hole and wave like crazy. The driver won't see you but others might. Also some car trunks have an internal release. Become familiar with your own car before an emergency.

Preventing Tragedies:

Of course it is best to avoid dangerous situations. Here are some basic things to remember:

- **Even if you think you are safe, pay attention.**
Criminals really are lurking. When a criminal sees someone who is distracted, he will strike...and act before you are aware that there is any danger.
- **Trust your instincts.**
If a situation makes you feel uncomfortable, get out fast. Your intuition often is right.

- **Project the image that you are alert and ready for action.**
Keep your head up and walk briskly. Women—if you are on the street or in a parking lot and someone catches your eye or looks you over---look back at him. Sending the message that you see him and won't be surprised is a good deterrent.
- **Don't be nice to strangers.**
We all have an inclination to help others. Criminals know this and take advantage of it. Don't let anyone stop you to ask for change, directions or the time.
- **Avoid places that are potentially dangerous.**
Don't drive through bad neighborhoods to save time. Take the elevator not the stairs. Use ATMs inside buildings whenever possible. Exterior ATMs expose your back to people on the street while you are distracted, making you an easy target.
Parking lots and garages are dangerous places. Don't walk into an empty parking garage alone. If you notice a man sitting alone in the car next to yours, don't go to your car. Return when the man has gone or call the police.

Don't park next to a van or between two sport-utility vehicles. Before getting in your car, look under and inside your vehicle and also check the one next to yours. Once in your car, don't sit there with the window open, chatting on your cell phone. Immediately lock the doors, start the car and leave the area.

Safety Tip: School will be starting soon. Drive carefully to avoid an accident. Obey all traffic laws and watch out for kids.

