



SEPS

the situation determines the solution

MODULE 7 - SEPS WOMEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY PROGRAM

Some people, especially if you have been the victim of violence, may find some of the subject matter contained in this article disturbing or traumatizing. If you are still in the process of recovering from violence and abuse, you may want to consult with a mental health professional before reading this content. The subject matter is also intended for an adult audience, and so if you are under 18, you should have an adult read the material first (parental guidance is advised for people under 18). This article addresses the subject matter head-on, so reader discretion is advised.

SYNOPSIS

This module looks at some distinct situations that a person may find themselves in, and/or have concerns/questions about. Although Home Invasions are rare, (as is being at home when a burglary takes place, etc.) these are still incidents that do happen, and concern people. All of us have to travel, whether on public transport or in cars, sometimes as part of our jobs and sometimes for leisure - our travel may also see us go to foreign or different cities, etc. This module looks at preventative measures that can be put in place around home and travel security, as well as how to non-physically deal with certain situations and scenarios, should they occur. The situational factors and principles that are demonstrated in this module should translate across scenarios and situations and not be restricted just to those explained.

HOME SECURITY

Being assaulted in their home, a place where they should feel safe and secure, is for many women their greatest fear. It is certainly one of the most asked questions that we receive, both in classes and at seminars, as well as via email i.e. "what should I do if I'm at home in bed and I hear someone in my house?" Though this question will be addressed, it should be also understood that a criminal first has to get into your house/flat, etc., and that different house-breaking criminals have different motivations e.g. most are after your possessions, whilst others maybe after you.

Predatory Individuals can get into your home through the following means:

- You can invite them in (this applies to both friends/acquaintances and strangers)
- They can force their way in, either when you open the door to them, or as you access your property, etc.
- They can break-in to your property, forcing an entry

It is not the aim of this module to look at how to profile predators who are trying to get you to invite them into your property "willingly" (this is largely covered in module 1, in the section on grooming); this module will look at points 2 and 3 i.e. people who force access to get into your property.

GETTING FROM YOUR CAR TO YOUR HOUSE

The chances of someone waiting for you outside your house are quite small (the risk goes up if you are being stalked, etc.) however you can never discount the possibility that somebody in your neighborhood - or work - has been observing you, and if your lifestyle is relatively predictable, knows the times you are likely to be arriving home on various days. If you are ever able to randomize your movements, it will be difficult for anyone who wishes you harm to synchronize their movements to yours e.g. if you always go to the supermarket after work on a Tuesday, sometimes go on a Wednesday, etc.

Anyone who wants to wait for you needs some form of concealment or a justifiable reason to spend time in a particular location, otherwise a neighbor or someone who frequents that area may report their presence to the police, etc. Even if this is unlikely, it will be the thinking of anyone who is hanging around waiting for you to return. Trees and bushes - especially if overgrown - near to your house, (particularly by entryways - windows and doors), could allow someone to both wait unseen, as well as be concealed when trying to break in. Keeping the areas around doors and windows visible to the outside world is one of the simplest ways to prevent both break-ins, and people lurking/waiting for you. If you don't own the property you live in, and there are overgrown bushes, etc., surrounding windows and doors, ask your landlord to cut them back. If there are trees, etc. which cannot be easily cut back, look to plant thorny bushes and plants around them in order to make it impossible for somebody to use these trees and plants for cover.

Having motion sensor lighting installed, is another good way to be alerted to anyone who may be loitering around during dusk and darkness - make sure the sensors and the lights are out of reach, so that they can't be tampered with e.g. the sensors taped over with black tape, or the light-bulbs removed etc. Make sure that these lights extend the distance you have to walk from your car to your door, so that you are lit the entire time that you are walking. Again, if you are renting, see if this is something your landlord will let you install. Your goal with the outside sensor lighting is not just to be

able to detect persons who may be waiting for you, but to make sure that you are visible to the outside world (neighbors and passers-by, etc.), as you walk to your front door. If you're dealing with someone who is fearful of being caught, and if you can ensure that you are always visible, they will be less likely to target you.

When you park your car at night, try to use your headlights to illuminate the area surrounding the place where you are going to park. Once parked, turn the lights off - keeping the central locking on - and let your eyes adjust to the darkness for a few moments. Sitting still for a moment will allow you to get a better feel for your environment. You can use the mirrors of the car to try and detect any movement around you. If you think you hear something, wait and check to see if the noise is repeated (don't have the car radio on when you check your environment) and if you can ascertain the source (keeping your mouth open as you do this will improve your ability to hear). Waiting and doing nothing, is a good way to force someone who may be lurking to act early and reveal themselves. Predators will expect you to follow a predictable script i.e. pull up, park, get out of the car, and walk to your door; by interrupting this script and behaving in an unpredicted fashion, they may be forced to reevaluate their plan e.g. they may believe you have spotted them and that's why you're not leaving your car, etc. - and this may cause them to reveal themselves, and their intentions, early.

Don't use your mobile phone as you walk to your door. Many people feel that they are safer if somebody knows where they are, but in truth the person at the other end of the line is unable to help, and they will take longer to react and respond to any assault that they may hear, than the assault itself will probably take (just as your first reaction to the threat of danger will be denial, so will that of the person you are talking to, and they will have to deliberate about what to do, reach a decision, and then act on it, etc. - all of which will take time you haven't got). One of the reasons people feel safer talking to someone on the phone is that the conversation takes them away from their reality - of not feeling safe - and in to the reality of the person they are talking to; who is feeling safe. Anything that distracts you from your environment, negatively affects your safety. If you want to use your phone as a means of ensuring your safety, ring or text someone when you leave one location (such as your car) and then again when you reach your next. Inform them of how long it should take you to get between the two and then give directions on what to do should this time be exceeded. It is important to give third parties who you are using as your support system instructions on what to do; you don't want them trying to deliberate on the best course of action to take, as they will most likely freeze if they hear a cry for help, or hear some kind of assault.

One of the other reasons that talking on the phone as a safety precaution is a bad idea is that it allows you to put the responsibility for your safety onto someone else. Personal safety is a personal responsibility, and to rely on another person to keep you safe is effectively adopting the mindset of a victim i.e. there is nothing I can do. Your mobile phone makes a great "improvised weapon" that can be used to strike to the face, but it does nothing to dissuade an assailant from attacking you in the

first place. In fact, on the contrary - if a predatory individual sees you on the phone, he may believe - correctly - that you are distracted from what is going on in your immediate environment, and profile you as a potential victim.

Before you exit your car, make sure you have your house key in your hand. Hold it between your thumb and forefinger in order to use it like a short knife that you can use to cut an assailant's face - don't hold it between your fingers like an improvised knuckle duster. Most assaults happen at close range and you will probably not be given the room to make a solid, effective strike, whereas you will probably be able to get a hand to your attacker's face and be able to drag the key across their eyes, nose, cheek and throat etc. in a cutting action. The key(s) will also likely shift and slide between your fingers as you strike with them, negating the effect you are going for. Having your key in your hand will also enable you to get into your house quickly, rather than fumbling about on your key ring - a fine motor skill that will be hard to perform when stressed and adrenalized. (Bear in mind that it may be safer to leave the environment and return with law enforcement, rather than potentially ending up with your assailant forcing entry as you unlock your door.)

If your car has a remote locking device, this is the time to use it - don't ever use it to find your car, as it lets any potential assailants know that: a) you're lost/confused in your environment, b) the direction in which you are heading and c) that the safest place you have in your environment is unlocked. Using the remote lock to secure your car means that you don't have to turn your back to lock the car manually. If you can see your car from your front door, it may be advisable to lock it only when you have your front door open. This then gives you an accessible secure location to retreat to should you see somebody approach you as you walk to your door.

A great thing to have in your car is a Tactical Flashlight. These are small flashlights which are incredibly bright and can momentarily blind someone if shone directly in the face. Often all you need is a moment's hesitation on the part of an assailant to disengage and either get back in your car, or get to a well-lit public place. Whilst your house is your ultimate destination, if you are going to have to fumble with a lock to get the door open you may be wasting the few seconds' time and distance you have created for yourself. Creating more distance and time between you and your assailant is a much better strategy - it may be sensible to use your car as a barrier/obstacle to keep between you and your attacker, moving around it and screaming at them to stay back (it really doesn't matter what you scream or shout). If you do this whilst keeping your flashlight on you will be both visible and audible, which in itself will be a large deterrent for your assailant to continue their attempted assault.

There are some self-defense systems that advocate that you should scream "fire" rather than "rape", as people will respond to a fire, but not to a sexual assault. This urban myth comes from 19th century London where homes were packed so close together that a potential fire would affect all the houses around, so neighbors would come out on the streets to help put a fire out, where they wouldn't if they

thought they would have to intervene in an assault. When you scream and shout at an assailant it is to bring their attention to the fact that their actions will potentially be witnessed. No sexual predator will want their face to be associated with the word "rape", and is more likely to disengage. If you shout fire, somebody may look out, fail to see a fire, and instead just see somebody standing shouting at another person who could be their boyfriend, partner, etc. Call it for what it is.

Never be afraid to get back in your car, walk away from your house, etc., if you believe there is somebody lurking or hanging around. Don't be afraid to get back in your car, lock the doors, turn the engine on (in case you need to get away) and either call a friend/neighbor to come and help you, or inform the police. Being wrong and being safe is far better than denying the reality of a threat to your safety. The last thing that you want is for somebody to force their way in to your home as you enter/unlock it, or force you into it with a threat of violence. Once there/inside your assailant will not need to rush their assault.

When you get into your house, close and lock the door immediately (the same applies when you first get into your car), if you are carrying bags, etc. don't look for a place to put them before you close and lock the door. Many people leave the door open as they carry their groceries through their house into the kitchen; If you do a large supermarket shop at the same time each week, and a predators know this, along with the fact that you leave your door open as you unload the car, and transport your shopping to the kitchen, then you are leaving yourself vulnerable and open to the possibility of an assault. If you can limit what you carry when you leave the car, you will find it much quicker to get to your front door and have a hand free to have your keys ready to open it.

DEALING WITH PEOPLE AT YOUR DOOR

If you live alone, or in a house where there are no men, it is a good idea to present to the casual observer/predator that this isn't the case. Simple things like a men's pair of muddy work boots left outside on the porch can be a simple way of creating the illusion that you don't live alone. Better still, put out a dog's water bowl - dogs are one of the best deterrents to would-be house breakers. These are simple steps that are often just enough to cause a potential criminal or assailant to hesitate, pause and think and move on to a "softer" target. This is referred to as victim displacement i.e. your actions and behaviors don't stop a predator or criminal from being such, rather it causes them to look elsewhere for a victim.

If you are in an apartment block where you have a nameplate on the door that would normally read Ms Angela Richardson etc. change it to be gender neutral e.g. A Richardson. This is a good way to present yourself to the outside world wherever your name has to be listed or displayed.

Your first line of defense should be a spy hole. Knowing who you are dealing with - and even if they

are who they say they are, etc. will allow you to decide whether to open your door to them. Remember you are never obligated to open your door to anyone, and many predators will use their target's politeness, niceness and unwillingness to offend/be rude against them. Where personal safety is concerned, not opening or answering your door because you feel something is wrong, is not being rude.

After deciding to open the door, you should use a solid door chain to help prevent the door being forced open. Your chain should be supported with a door wedge/jam; a simple rubber, or wooden one used to keep doors open will suffice. When you open the door, simply kick it into place under it. This will give added integrity to the chain, should someone try to break the chain by kicking or barging the door. You can get door wedges that have an alarm fitted in them that will go off if the door is forced (these are also great things to take on holiday or when you travel, to secure your hotel room, etc.). Make sure that the chain you have fitted is both short - so as a person's arm cannot easily reach inside, and to make sure that the door can't be swung with any momentum - and securely attached. Don't simply superficially screw it in and hope that it will act as a deterrent; too many criminals have come across shoddy home security improvements and are not averse to testing their effectiveness.

When you open your door, it would be sensible to make sure you are able to grab a canister of OC/CS Spray, or have one in the hand that is not visible to the person you've opened the door to. OC (Oleoresin Capsicum) or Pepper Spray causes temporary blindness - through the closing of the eyes - and respiratory problems i.e. difficulty breathing, burning lungs etc. Being sprayed is also extremely painful. OC Spray is a great less-than-lethal weapon that is extremely effective at subduing even the most aggressive individuals.

Be aware that not everyone who comes to your door may be who they say they are, and you should look for signs that support their claims e.g. A repairman from a telephone company who says they have to fix a problem on your line, will not only be in uniform (something that is pretty easy for any predator to get hold of) but also have a van standing outside your house, etc. Predatory individuals, posing as "officials", know that you will ask them for ID before letting them in, and so many will have created, doctored or got hold of something that they can use to satisfy your request. If, however, there is no van or vehicle that supports their claim, then you should judge them suspiciously. There is always a danger in using "rules" to protect yourself e.g. if you have the rule that a workman or similar caller has to provide you with ID before you let them in, what happens when they are able to do this, but you still feel unsure and uneasy about them? They've satisfied your request; do you let them in, or not? It's a much safer approach to go with your gut and instincts. If it feels wrong, it probably is.

DEALING WITH THE "BUMP IN THE NIGHT"

Most burglaries happen during the day when people are out, however some criminals do prefer to

work at night. There are those who are simply burglars, whilst there are others who may have the primary goal of burglary, but will sexually assault a lone female resident, should they come across one. There are also those individuals - although rare - who will have watched and observed you for some time before breaking in to your home with the goal of abducting or assaulting you, etc.

The majority of burglars don't want to run into the homeowners or residents of the property they're burgling - they want goods, money, etc., and a speedy exit. If they believe that people are in the house, they will be more likely to pass it by and move on to one which is vacant. Simple things to do when you are not home are to leave lights on timers for nighttime, and for daytime have two radios, tuned to different talk radio stations (preferably of different political persuasions) playing in different parts of the house - this gives the illusion of multiple occupancy, which is an even greater deterrent than single occupancy.

If you are at home, whether at night or during the daytime, when somebody has broken into your property, your first thought should be to disengage and vacate your property. This may seem counter-intuitive, but if someone has managed to breach all of your defenses, the location you are in is no longer safe and you should leave it. This is often psychologically hard to do, as we feel there is nowhere safer than our home, and to leave it would seem like we were putting ourselves in more danger e.g. by going out onto the street, etc., however the greatest danger at this time is in your home. Sometimes it is not possible to leave your house because there may be children or dependents in it. This is why you should have one room nominated as a "safe room", which has a strong lockable door - this can also be reinforced using a security bar once everyone is inside (a security bar, does the job that an improvised wedged chair does when its tipped so that the top is under the handle and the feet are angled against the floor).

If you would like to see how you can create a safe room - or to secure your room in a shared house etc. - for under \$100, please [click here](#).

Make sure that your safe room has a window, as you will also want an escape route should you believe the door will be broken down or in the event of a fire. If you are on the ground floor, you should make sure that your window isn't an easy point of entry for a burglar - there are many security window bars on the market (these are relatively cheap) that can ensure that a window can't be prised open from the outside, as well as more expensive film that can be put over a window, which will hold the glass in place should somebody attempt to smash/break it. Although this doesn't stop the glass from breaking, it makes it difficult for a burglar to actually use the hole they've created to unlock and open the window. The more time it takes for a person to break in, the more likely they are to give up, and move on to another house. If your safe room is above ground level, make sure it has a fire-escape ladder in it - these are normally steel versions of a rope ladder that you can hook over a sill, and then climb down.

Your safe room does not have to be a bedroom, it can be any room that has a reinforced, lockable door and a window large enough to escape from.

Once you have everybody inside, call the police and tell them that you believe there is an intruder in your house. If you can do this from a fixed line, rather than a mobile phone, this is better, because if for any reason you can't complete the call e.g. the intruder is managing to break down the door, etc. if you leave the receiver of the hook the call should be able to be traced to your property (more quickly than a cell phone can be traced), and a patrol car dispatched.

If for whatever reason you are unable to get to your safe-room, and the intruder is likely to approach your room, shout loudly that you have called the police - even if you haven't - and that they will be here in 3 minutes. You need to give your intruder the chance to escape. If they believe they have time to exit your property without being caught in 99 times out of 100, they will take that chance. No criminal will be looking to get caught. If you simply say that you've called the police, they may panic, believing they could turn up at any minute, and decide that their best course of action is to take you as a hostage and wait for the authorities to turn up in order to negotiate their way out (if you haven't been able to call the police, this will be a long wait, and what may have been intended to be a simple burglary could turn in to a prolonged assault).

Your best defense to being put in such a situation is to have every access point to your home secured. This means windows, front and back doors, basement doors, garage doors, etc. Make sure that the doors leading into basements and garages are secure, as well. If an intruder can get into a basement or garage, they will no longer be visible to the outside world, and can take their time to break down the next obstacle presented to them; the harder this is for them to do and the longer it takes them, the more likely they will give up and move on.

CAR SECURITY

People use their cars to express themselves. In fact, you can tell a lot about a person from their car. Not really from the make and model, etc., but from the bumper stickers they have, and what's on the backseat, etc. This may give a criminal a lot of pertinent information concerning you, whether your car is parked on your driveway, or in a parking lot.

Some car/bumper stickers are gender neutral, others are not. It may seem to be sensible to demonstrate a show of strength to the outside world by having car stickers that express "Girl Power" and female strength, however these also show to the outside world that this car is probably driven by a woman. It may not matter to a predator that the car is driven by a confident woman, in fact this may in the case of certain anger rapists be the equivalent of a red flag to a bull. It is always better to fly

under the radar than make a display of strength and force. If your car appears extremely feminine, or even feminist, you are telling the world that this car belongs to a woman. That you have the right to do so in a country of free speech and free expression is an admirable thing, but from a personal safety perspective it may not be the best move.

Be careful what you leave on the rear or passenger seats of your car. A pink gym bag may not only invite a criminal to break in, in order to steal it, but it will also clearly mark out the owner (in the absence of any other personal belongings) as a female driver. Just as leaving a pair of men's work boots on your porch can make it appear that at least one of the occupants of the house is a man, you can create a similar impression with your car by leaving a copy of Men's Fitness - or other Men's Magazine - in a visible place (no one will break in to your car to steal an out-of-date copy of a men's magazine).

Parking lots are a place that criminals do frequent. One way to lessen the risk to both yourself and your vehicle is to park where there is a lot of "natural surveillance". If you can park in the area of the lot which has either a lot of foot or vehicular traffic that passes by your car, you will reduce the risk of your car being broken into, or it being the scene of a violent confrontation/incident e.g. if you park near one of the entrance and exit routes into a parking lot, your car will almost always have a pair of eyes on it as drivers come into, or leave, the parking lot. Make sure this is a well-lit area of the lot, and that there is a direct and easily visible route from whatever store/restaurant you are visiting to your car i.e. not one where you have to cut through rows of parked cars. Don't use your remote lock to find your car; this will not only alert any criminals as to where you are heading, it will also unlock the one safe place you have in the environment.

When you approach your car, try not to have too many bags in your hands - and at the very least be prepared to drop what you are carrying in order to defend yourself, or get to your car quickly. Rather than directly approaching the driver's side door, or the trunk, where criminals will know you are heading, approach your car head-on. This will allow you to see if anyone is waiting by either the driver or passenger side door.

If you do have, or are carrying, valuable items in your car, don't put them into the trunk after arriving in a parking lot. If anyone sees you do this e.g. put a bag into your trunk before locking the car, they will assume it contains valuables, and either break in to your car whilst you are gone, or more likely wait for you to return and unlock the car - if you unlock it using the remote when at distance, you create the perfect opportunity for somebody to steal the bag/valuables. It may be that they will wait for you to return and then use a weapon such as a knife or gun, to force you to open the trunk for them.

When driving, keep the central locking on and your windows up. If somebody indicates that there is something wrong with your car, acknowledge them but keep driving until you find a garage or an area

which is highly populated before you stop to check. Be extremely suspicious of anyone who is extremely insistent that you pull over; it is unlikely that there is something so wrong with your car that you would be unaware of it when driving. You should make sure that you are a member of a motoring organization such as AAA (in the U.S.) or the AA, RAC or Green Flag (in Europe), etc. If you break down, you do not want to have to get out of your car to try and fix the problem or work out a solution - if you have to call for assistance, mention that you are a single female driver (especially if you have broken down at night), as many dispatchers will be under instructions to give priority to lone female drivers. You may also want to call the police and make them aware of your situation - they may send a patrol car to wait with you, or to help you get your car to a safe place, etc. Stay in your car, and if any "good" Samaritan pulls over to help you or offer assistance, tell them that both the motoring organization and the police are aware of your situation and that a patrol car is on its way (even if one isn't). Be polite, courteous and confident - don't leave the car or roll your window down too far when talking to them. It is also worth having 911 (or 999 in the UK) pre-dialed into your phone, so you can readily make a call if you have to, and have the phone within easy reach. If you are close to home or near an area where you have friends, call them to see if they can come and wait with you, so you are not alone.

Criminals (including sexual predators) have been known to deliberately crash or bump their (stolen) car into the back of others at junctions, as well as on deserted country roads etc., in order to get the driver - usually a lone female - to stop/pull over in order to exchange insurance documents. When the driver gets out to inspect the damage, they are either mugged, abducted, or sexually assaulted. This happens in relatively busy areas, as well as secluded ones. There are few times that you actually need to get out of your car to inspect damage; despite your natural curiosity. It is better to exchange insurance documents from the safety of your car, and possibly call the police (if you believe you are unable to drive the vehicle, this is definitely something you should do).

If you carry/use CS Spray then you should think about keeping a canister in your car. If you are in a situation where you have to talk through a slightly rolled down window to a violent or persistent aggressor and can't make an immediate getaway, spraying the person you are dealing with is a good way to get them to move back from your car. Before you do this, you should have already called 911, or be doing this as you spray them, as if you are required to use this level of force, things have already escalated to a dangerous level. Physical force is always a last resort, and most criminals, if they know (or believe) assistance is on its way, will back off.

SEPS (Situation Effective Protection System) is a framework, for understanding how violent situations occur and evolve, along with the motivations behind them, so that it is possible to predict, identify and avoid them. The system was created and developed by Gershon Ben Keren and Andy Rallings. This handout is part of the SEPS free women's personal safety program developed by Gershon Ben Keren. For more information and other course modules,

please go to www.womensselfdefense-seps.com.

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