

Safety Tips

Welcome to life in the inner city. For most, this experience will mark a significant change from well-manicured lawns of suburbia and/or from college campus. As you will learn the nitty gritty details of your ministries and discover community members' favorite meals, you will also learn how to live in your neighborhood and its surrounding areas. To help you get started, the following list of helpful hints and common sense reminders was composed by other volunteers. The bottom line?

Learn to take an active approach to personal safety.

On the streets:

- * Act confident! The reality of self-assurance comes with time, yet some semblance of purpose and confidence, even in uncertain situations, helps divert unwanted attention. A timid stance or a searching glance is a green light for 'help' of all kinds.
- * Learn your territory. Get a map of your city, learn it, and carry it with you. If you aren't a 'map person,' take a driving adventure to explore with members of your community. Get input from people in the know about neighbors, specific areas, places to approach with caution, etc.
- * Have your keys ready before you approach a door or gate. Time spent searching through your pockets or bag gives Joe and Jane Robber an opportunity to approach as you are distracted.
- * Separate where you carry your money -- spread it out in different pockets, a jacket, etc. Also, if you give change to people on the street, carry the change separately rather than exposing your wallet. Rather than giving money, consider getting someone something to eat or drink ... or perhaps carry an extra granola bar with you to give to someone who is hungry.
- * Trust your instincts! If you think someone on the street is best avoided, do so. Chances are good that you're not just paranoid. If you are wrong, you will never know. If you are right, you may never know either!
- * If you are threatened on the street, yell for help ... Yell out "FIRE." Some will not hear -- or perhaps will not respond -- to calls for "HELP." Fire is something that effects everyone in the area ... and peaks people's curiosity. It will draw attention.

Commuting to/from your Ministries:

- * In the winter, darkness falls early, meet each other so someone does not travel home alone.
- * If you walk or bike, alter your route to work. Surprise yourself (and others) with your spontaneity.
- * Be sure not to forget someone who needs to be picked up from/dropped off (i.e. to a ministry site).

In your community:

- * Know each other's schedules. Be responsible for knowing where your community members are, and don't be afraid to take action when you are concerned (remember the old saying, "better safe than sorry").
- * Be equally responsible to let others know the area you'll be and especially at what hour you expect to return. Leave notes, call, alert others to changing plans. Keep your independence, but also keep yourself & each other safe.

(in your community, continued ...)

- * Be accepting of your community members' levels of comfort in the house and the neighborhood. Support each other with your presence when asked -- and don't be hesitant to ask for company yourself.
- * Lock your doors and windows and check them. Remain particularly conscious of first floor access. Don't get lazy as you become more comfortable; break-ins occur when opportunities present themselves.
- * Do not leave keys or money sitting directly next to a window or door -- any item is very easy to steal in those locations!
- * If there is an issue with a door or window not working/locking properly, let your friar know so it can be addressed -- or if you are able, fix it.
- * When your house is empty, have someone pick up your mail and newspapers. Also try to find a Friar, a friend or a neighbor to check the house periodically, turning on and off different lights and creating some ruckus/lived-in look.
- * When your community leaves home together (for one of those long-anticipated retreats or gatherings), be careful about your departure. Don't advertise a lengthy get-away. Say 'goodbye' to an imaginary friend even.

Personal tips:

- * Don't wear exposed jewelry. Put your valuables away.
- * Put away your purse, empty your wallet. Carry only what you need on any given occasion (you will probably find it is not much).
- * If you run/walk for exercise, alter your route using well-traveled roads/paths. Don't be predictable, except to your housemates who should know your different routes and expected time of return (i.e. if you fall & sprain your ankle and are considerably late returning home, someone can know where to look for you).
- * Keep a list of local phone numbers (former volunteers, support people, ministry sites, etc.) with you in case of emergency. Or have them with easy access on your cell phone.
- * Don't travel alone at night.
- * Don't take chances.
- * Avoid deserted area -- streets, subway stations, bathrooms, etc. Crowds are your friends.
- * If you use money machines, do so in the daytime and in the company of others.
- * If you think someone is telling you a story to get some money, they probably are. Con artists wouldn't make a living if they didn't appear genuine.
- * Don't leave anything of value in the car. Automobiles are easy and frequent targets.
- * Carry Identification.