



Situational Awareness Bulletin: Personal Safety

Information Series Issue No. 2 / FEB 2022

This publication was developed as a situational awareness bulletin to assist an organization's personnel in maintaining personal safety throughout their travels and all other facets of their life. It is meant to inspire others to maintain a healthy amount of awareness and to adopt a mindset that reduces their chance of being a target of a criminal element.



Situational Awareness Defined

As there are many definitions to the term "situational awareness", let's examine the main components frequently listed in various definitions. We will explore and expand on many of these throughout this document.

- Use of your sensory system
- Use of your knowledge, experience, and instincts
- Scanning your environment
- Recognizing the elements of the environment and relating them to one another
- Identifying possible threats & indicators

Note: Not every situation can be prevented. In those cases, situational awareness may not help to avoid a dangerous situation, but it can increase one's reaction time and thus improve the quality of one's decision making in a crisis. In these terms, it becomes a valuable tool as both a technique and a mindset.

Recommendation: Establish Baselines

Establishing a a baseline of your environment allows you to notice something that doesn't appear to be normal, also referred to as an *anomaly*. If you don't actively register what is normal, you can't notice what isn't normal. You might even notice someone that you observed earlier in the morning at the subway entrance now loitering outside your place of work. This is what is referred to as a *correlation* over time and distance. Maybe there is a legitimate reason for that person's extended presence in your environment. But...maybe that person all of a sudden starts to leave and follows you and you are now more aware of a possible stalker. The fact is, now you've noticed it and are invested in your personal safety.

Inside the Bulletin

Situational Awareness Defined	pg. 1
Recommendations	
Establish Baselines	pg. 1
Be Present and Alert	pg. 2
See Something, Say Something	pg. 2
Look Ahead	pg. 3
Play the What-if Game	pg. 3
Be Aware of the Profile of a Victim	pg. 4
Look for indicators	pg. 5
Harden the Target	pg. 6

Additional NYC Resources

911 for emergencies

311 for non-emergencies requests

NYC Main Website (www.nyc.gov)

- Crime Statistics
- Community Affairs
- NYPD Services
- Crime Prevention Tips & Services

National Crime Prevention Council

www.ncpc.org

Department of Homeless Services

www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/index.page





Situational Awareness Bulletin: Situational Awareness & Personal Safety

Information Series Issue No. 2 / Jan 2022

Recommendation: Be Present and Alert

The first recommendation that can be offered is to be “present” when you are in public. This relates directly to your senses. Although this may seem like a simple task, many readers could probably relate to taking a train during their commute and spent their entire trip with their heads in their phones and may have even worn earphones during the whole trip. Many people will get to their destination and will feel as if the trip “took no time at all” when, in reality, it was an hour long. This is an unfortunate element of many cell phone “snatches” that occur when people are focused in their mobile devices while standing near subway car doors. As the doors close, a criminal element will snatch the phone and flee to the shock of an unaware victim. Remaining present all the time is not an easy task but the responsibility of it starts with each of us.

- Be focused and remain vigilant
- Allow all your senses to be present
- Take time to look around you periodically
- Do not be fixated on electronics, books or other visuals for a prolonged period of time
- While using earphones, do not cover both ears or play the audio too loud muffling out your environment
- Do not sleep while commuting
- Do not become complacent



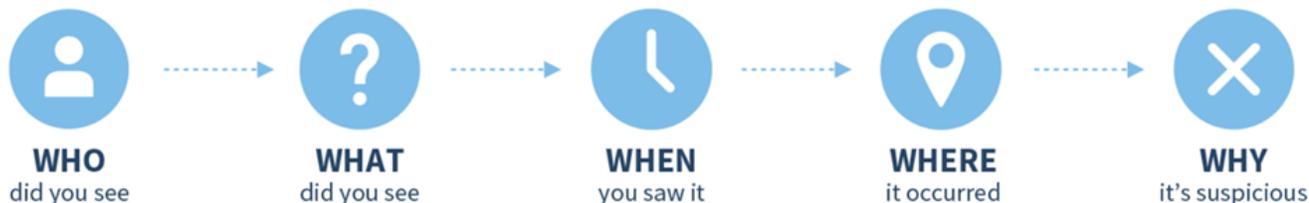
Recommendation: See Something, Say Something!

We encourage you to report suspicious / criminal activity when you see something. This includes reaching out to the following resources in and around NY. **Out-of-state residents are encourage to seek local resources as well.**

- For emergencies, call 9-1-1
- For requests for non-emergency governmental assistance, call 3-1-1
- For NYS residents reporting suspicious activity, please call 866-SAFE-NYS
- For NYC residents reporting suspicious activity, can also call 888-NYC-SAFE
- To find your location’s reporting number, please visit:

<https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something/how-to-report-suspicious-activity>

When you call, be prepared to provide the following:





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Recommendation: Look Ahead

While practicing good situational awareness, we may fail to focus on the entire environment. It is human nature to notice the closest things around oneself but this recommendation encourages you to extend that awareness to a greater distance than one may not be accustomed to. Focusing to a greater distance will provide you with an increased opportunity to move in a new direction or prepare for a potential confrontation.



Furthest

- Look ahead to plan ahead
- Allow your environment to impact your decision making

Middle

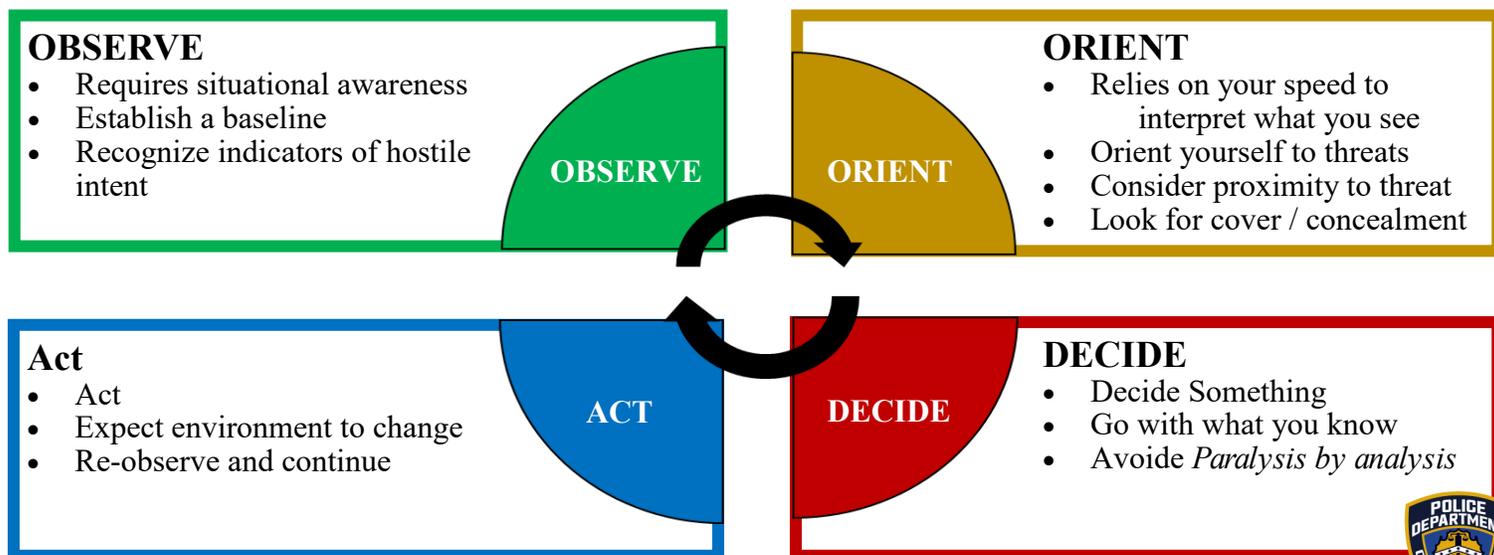
- Look for exit routes
- Look for police, security, or another authority that may be of help if needed

Closest

- Look for suspicious people or others to avoid
- Look for hazards to avoid including any non-criminal elements (puddles, potholes, the walk sign changing, etc.)

Recommendation: Play the “What-if” Game

A valuable tool utilized to help improve one’s own mindset and awareness in an emergency is the “what-if” game. We can pose questions such as, “What if I feel like I’m being followed? What if there was someone near my car in the parking lot that I didn’t recognize? Who would I turn to for help if I saw two people fighting with weapons in my train car on the way home? They are “bad day” scenarios that can help us prepare and hopefully never need, to use. Keep in mind, decision making is complex and requires constant additional decisions based on the new information after we make the initial decision. Once you make a decision, the environment will change and the process will repeat itself. To understand this better we can take a modest look at the strategic decision making process introduced by *Colonel John Boyd* of the U.S. Air Force. This model of intuitive decision making, often referred to as the “*OODA Loop*”, proposes 4 stages of the process, including Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act.



OODA Loop





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Information Series Issue No. 2 / Jan 2022

Recommendation: Be Aware Of Common Exhibited Behaviors of “Victims”

In no way is this section an attempt to blame a victim for their actions. The guilt belongs to the bad person who chooses to break the law. Our attempt with this recommendation is to examine the perspective of a potential thief or criminal. That’s right, take a moment to think like the “bad person”. This is an exercise in considering what they may see and what often motivates an opportunist to larceny, robbery, violence, etc. Considering what they find to be the “profile of a victim”, we can incorporate these lessons to help us plan and prepare our own actions and project less vulnerability. As you read them, you will see that many will relate to the other ones.

Behavior: Looking like you have something very valuable to protect

- Plan ahead
- Conceal your valuables so that you don’t keep checking on them.
- Carry money in separate pockets
- Use alternate means of transportation
- Be aware of scams. Sometimes a person will ask you if you dropped your wallet or money because, as is often human nature, you will pat or spot-check the area where you have yours secured. Now they know where it is.

Behavior: Exhibiting valuable items (designer bags, expensive footwear or jewelry)

If personal safety is a concern of yours, you may have to balance fashion and discretion.

- Tuck away expensive jewelry while you are in public.
- Keep purses tucked close to your body.
- Avoid placing bags or purses out of sight (ie: Behind your back as you eat at a restaurant)
- Be observant of others that might seem to take an extra interest in the item.

Behavior: Appearing to be lost or unaware of your surroundings

Opportunists and criminals often watch their victims. They scan and read body language with the best of them.

- Take the time to know your routes.
- Save your locations so you can reduce time searching for it.
- Better to ask for directions from a trustworthy source than to spend a prolonged time on your phone trying to orient yourself.

Behavior: Not reacting to being jostled / nudged in a crowded space

- Try to maintain a personal space for yourself.
- Keep your back against a wall if possible
- Keep your valuables safe inside zippered pockets
- Try to keep notice of anyone trying to move closer to you



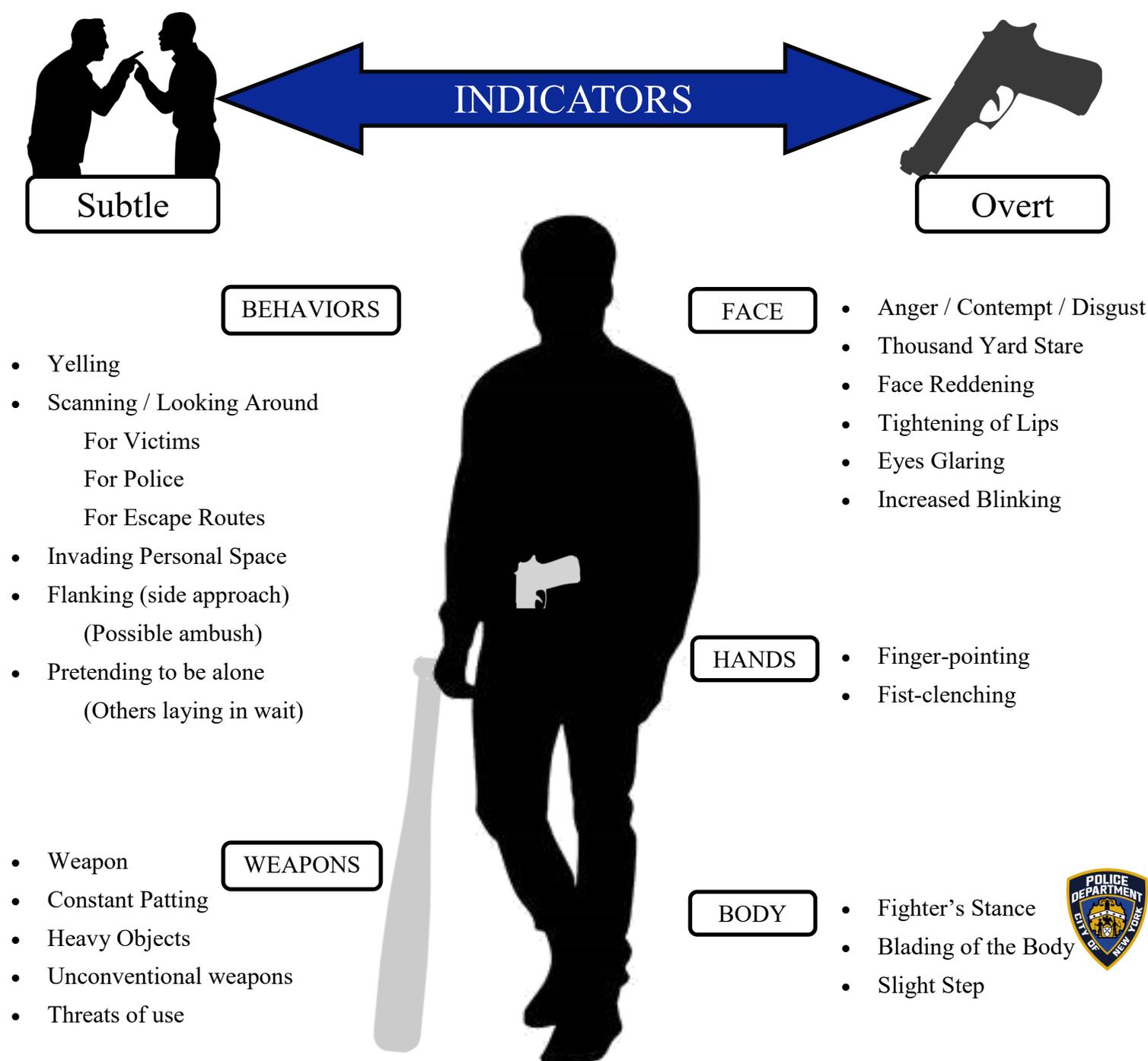


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Recommendation: Look For Indicators of Aggression, Hostile Intent, and Possession of a Weapon

Below is a list, in no specific order, of some possible indicators. There are more to learn about and we encourage you to do so. Please decide if each one would be considered subtle, overt, dangerous, etc. We encourage you to add these and other conditions to the mental scenarios you practice in your head.





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Information Series Issue No. 2 / Jan 2022

Recommendation: Harden the Target

The following recommendations are intended to assist you in increasing your personal safety. As previously mentioned, the materials in this product are not intended to create fear, anxiety, cause exhaustive hypervigilance, or make the reader paranoid. The police department and many other countermeasures are in place and successfully operate everyday. On the other side of the coin, we can't control the entire world around us. Accepting this and adopting the proper mindset to plan ahead (and be prepared) will help you "harden the target". We should each invest in our own personal safety and heeding the following suggestions will help you do so.

Please remember that this list is not all encompassing and we encourage you to continue to seek out additional resources and services that may increase your personal safety. This can include exploring some websites (on first page), reading additional articles, speaking to consultants, and attending self-defense and / or sexual assault prevention classes within your local community. Lastly, many of these recommendations below will apply to several environments. For example, the reminder to stay a safe distance from the edge of a train platform so that you are not pushed, accidentally nudged, or trip, also applies to the curb of a sidewalk on a busy day with vehicular traffic nearby.

Beforehand / Preparation

- Watch the news and be aware of crime patterns in your area
- Place your cash in multiple places
- Carry a small umbrella in case it rains and you need to take the long way around
- Beware of what you post on the internet
 - Violence may not be from opportunity but rather intentional and targeted
- If a condition exists or is expected that limits mobility or cognitive abilities, plan for a safe way to travel
 - Ex. Trouble walking or the presence of alcohol may lead you to make non-typical accommodations
- Know who to call if you need help (ex. 911, family member, transportation company)

Sidewalk, Open Areas, and Similar Environments

- Beware of intentional distractions (ex. Street performers, people having a verbal dispute, etc.)
- Avoid alleys, vacant lots, and suspicious short cuts where someone may limit your ability to escape
- Travel in well lit areas and notify building security if you see a condition requiring maintenance
- Do not check your valuables in public, if necessary, find a bathroom or secluded space
- Be aware of scam artists and do not engage strangers (ex. asking for change, asking what time is it, etc.)
- Visually scan your area well when leaving somewhere (lost items may not remain long)
- Keep bags and personal items close to you and especially when you sit or are in large crowds
- Keep your bags / accessories / pockets zippered or closed to discourage criminals
- Avoid high crime / known crime locations
- Avoid walking alone when possible—utilize shuttle service or have a co-worker as a travel buddy
- Be aware of who's watching you—is someone following you or slowly getting closer?
- Some criminals know Fridays are payday for most and thus some consider Fridays more likely to experience an incident of crime or violence. At the end of the day, it can happen anytime. Be prepared.
- Consider stopping and asking for help from a building's door man or security staff. They may be able to provide you secured shelter and act as a witness, assistant, etc.





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Subway System / Railroad Centric

- Beware of crowded spaces and pickpockets
- Ride the car that has the conductor in it if possible
- End cars are considered more dangerous as it is often closest to platform stairs (advantage to fleeing criminal).
- Avoid sleeping in a train car
- Avoid distractions from electronic devices / wearing earbuds
- Keep back from the edge of the subway platform or curb (preventing going on the road bed)
- Keep your belongings close and within view when you sit down



On Elevators

- Look inside the elevator to view who is already inside
- Don't enter if someone makes you uncomfortable
- When in doubt, take the stairs to exit if possible

In a Car or Parking Lot

- Lock the door immediately once inside
- Avoid road rage incidents
- Avoid leaving your keys in the car or leaving the car running
- Close your windows when parking the vehicle
- Conceal any belongings that may entice a criminal to break into the vehicle
- If someone approaches you, do not open your window fully
- If you begin to operate your vehicle, do not immediately exit your vehicle to inspect the noise (unless fire)



At ATM's and Financial Institutions

- Be aware of suspicious people near the ATM
- Use well lit, well-populated ATM's
- Protect your pin / passcode when entering it
- Do not let others enter the ATM lobby (a.k.a. piggybacking)
- Put your money away as soon as possible
- Use the mirrors at the ATM to see behind you



When Dealing with a Potential Encounter

- Try to avoid them and escape if possible
- Call 911 as soon as it is safe to do so and encourage others to call for you
- Be ready to make noise
 - Consider carrying a whistle, electronic whistle, air horn, yelling
- Keys are often suggested to use as improvised weapons
- If you need to, give up your belongings, they are not as valuable as your life.

