

Safer Living

Strategies to maximise
your safety and enhance
your wellbeing





Contents

You have the right to safety and a life without fear. The Queensland Police Service (QPS) *Safer Living* program provides practical personal safety advice that aims to maximise your safety and enhance your quality of life.

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Any communications should be addressed to:

The Intellectual Property Coordinator
Information Resource Centre
Queensland Police Service
GPO Box 1440 Brisbane QLD 4001
PH: 3364 3958 FX: 3364 3942
EM: lippiatt.sandra@police.qld.gov.au

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Educate yourself about safety risks to help put them in perspective

Core personal safety strategies

These strategies aim to reduce the risk of victimisation in a broad range of environments. You are encouraged to consider how you might incorporate them into your everyday life.

Exercise your right to safety

We all have the right to be safe with people. It is important that you are aware of, and exercise, this right. Adopting practical safety strategies will reduce the risk of victimisation and assist you to respond effectively should your safety be threatened. This brochure outlines a number of strategies to help you to do this.

Keep fear of violence in perspective

Many people have a fear of crime that is disproportionate to the actual safety risks they face. This can result in unnecessary limitations being placed on their lifestyle and a diminished quality of life. Your own sense of safety and comfort should be your guideline. Be aware of the safety risks, and if it feels safe, enjoy your right to choose what you do and when you do it.

It is also good to be aware of the most prevalent safety risks and implement practical strategies to minimise these risks. For example, did you know:

- women are more likely to be physically or sexually attacked by someone they know, often within the home
- men are more likely to be physically assaulted by someone they don't know, often at a licensed premises or in a public place
- the likelihood of being a victim of personal violence significantly decreases with age (from the age of 19 years).

For more information about safety risks, refer to the Queensland Police Service Annual Statistical Review at www.police.qld.gov.au.

Be committed

Being committed to your safety is fundamental to maintaining it. Many people have a strong commitment to preserving the safety of their loved ones, often willing to take any action if those people are in danger, but do not have the same level of commitment to their own safety.

Be confident

Display an air of confidence, even if it is a bluff. Attackers target vulnerability. The more confident you look the less likely you are to be attacked.

Your body language demonstrates confidence. Stand tall with your head up, shoulders back, walk with a purpose and make brief eye contact with passers-by. Try to appear comfortable in your surroundings.

Be aware of your surroundings

Continuously surveying your surroundings in a relaxed, positive manner can alert you to potential danger, enabling you to take action to avoid it. An awareness of your surroundings will also help you identify places or people who may provide assistance, if needed.

Trust and act on your instincts

Your instincts are sound. If you pick up a bad feeling from someone, or if you feel a sense of threat or danger, trust your instincts and remove yourself from the source of potential danger. This could mean walking or running away, or leaving the party or nightclub and going to a place where you feel safe.

Be assertive

Assertiveness is about using direct and honest communication that demonstrates self respect and respect for others. By communicating assertively in every day situations you are indicating to others that you will stand up for yourself and therefore do not present an easy target for potential offenders.

Develop a safety network

Consider developing a safety network of trusted people who will provide support and advice if you have a problem or if you are concerned for your personal safety. Your network may include friends, relatives, neighbours, work colleagues, community groups and police.

Demonstrate strong, confident body language and be aware of your surroundings





Develop a network of trusted people who will provide support and advice if you have a problem or if you are concerned for your safety

Dealing with confrontation

There is no single 'right way' to respond to a confrontation or attack. Every situation is different. Your most effective weapons are your personal judgment and your commitment to preserving your safety. The response you choose should aim to best preserve your safety. This decision should be based on three factors:

1. **Your personal strengths** - Which of the response options are you able to execute?
2. **The perceived motivations for the attack/confrontation** - Is the offender attempting to steal property from you or assault you? If the offender is attempting to rob you, you need to question whether it is worth placing your personal safety at risk for the sake of property that can be replaced.
3. **Environmental factors** - Are there people around who could provide assistance? Where could you run to for safety? What could you use to defend yourself if necessary?

Responses may include:

- escaping, e.g. by running away
- negotiating with the offender
- doing whatever the offender tells you to, as you wait for, or create, an opportunity to escape
- calling upon passers-by to assist
- screaming
- handing over property
- distracting the offender
- calling police (Triple Zero (000))
- physical self defence.

Remember, if the first strategy doesn't work, try something else. Keep taking action until the threat is removed. Report the incident to police as soon as you can.

You can help prepare yourself to deal with an incident prior to its occurrence by imagining possible safety threats and visualising how you would respond.

Have a personal safety plan

A personal safety plan is comprised of safety strategies chosen by you to suit your lifestyle and abilities. It involves adopting simple preventative strategies (e.g. *being aware of your surroundings and adopting positive body language*) to reduce the risk of victimisation as well as strategies to respond effectively should your safety be threatened (e.g. *calling for help or physically defending yourself*). These strategies should become habits you develop as you routinely implement your plan.



Is it worth placing your safety at risk for the sake of property that can be replaced?



While formal training is not needed to defend yourself effectively, self defence courses can help build confidence and a commitment to your safety

Self defence and the law

In Queensland you have the right to physically defend yourself with reasonable force, provided the force is authorised, justified or excused by law.

The law does not allow you to carry anything that can be described as an offensive weapon. This includes mace or spray dyes, or items that have been specially adapted, such as a sharpened comb, or knife carried for the purpose of self defence.

Self defence courses

It is not necessary to attend self defence classes or undertake martial arts training to be able to effectively defend yourself. Each person has a survival instinct that acts to preserve their safety if threatened. A crucial factor as to whether a person can successfully defend themselves is their commitment to their safety.

Even so, self defence courses remain an effective method of building confidence and commitment to safety. When deciding on self defence classes, consider these guidelines:

- ensure the instructor delivers empowering messages rather than being fear inducing
- check the qualifications of the instructor and obtain a referral if possible
- decide what you want to achieve from the classes – there is a difference between martial arts and basic self defence.

Situational safety strategies

The following strategies are provided as a guide only. You are encouraged to consider and implement strategies that most suit your needs and your lifestyle. In all situations, if you feel your safety is being threatened, call Triple Zero (000).

Safety in the home

General advice

- Be familiar with which neighbours you can go to in an emergency before an emergency happens.
- If you know your neighbour well, you may wish to work out a communication plan with them to let them know if you are concerned for your safety (e.g. calling them on the phone, yelling out to them or flicking your lights).
- Make your home less vulnerable to would be thieves by putting in place effective home security strategies¹.
- Avoid disclosing personal information to strangers by any means of communication.
- Know which doors and windows you can use in an emergency.

Visitors to the door

- Open your door only to people you know and trust. Use a peephole or a window to see who is outside.
- Check the identification of unknown visitors, including service repair people, sales people and charity workers.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel unsure do not allow someone entry to your home. If you feel unsafe call the police.
- If a stranger asks to use your phone, and you would like to help, consider making the call for them while keeping them outside.
- If you are home alone and feel concerned, pretend there is someone else in the house (e.g. yell out, “John, there’s someone at the door!”).



Check the identification of unknown visitors

¹ For Home Security advice please refer to the QPS website (www.police.qld.gov.au).



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You have the right to be safe with people – seek help if you feel unsafe

Confrontation in the home

By a known person:

- Firmly advise the person their behaviour is not welcome.
- Order them to leave.
- If they refuse, leave (even if it is your home) and seek help.
- Physically defend yourself (using reasonable force in the circumstances).
- Seek help from an appropriate service.
- Dial Triple Zero (000) in an emergency.

By an unknown person:

When dealing with an intruder in the home, choose the option you believe will keep you the most safe. Options may include:

- Dial Triple Zero (000) at the earliest opportunity.
- Leave the house immediately, with other occupants if possible, and go to a neighbour or somewhere safe to contact and wait for police.

- Turn on all the lights (inside and out), and make as much noise as possible to attract the attention of neighbours and passers-by and deter the intruder, e.g. activate your home or car alarm, turn the stereo and TV up to full volume.
- Leave the house in darkness and find a safe hiding place.
- If you are alone, call out to a fictitious person, e.g. "Harry! I'm sure I heard something, I'm calling the police."
- If you arrive home and suspect that an intruder is inside, do not go in. Instead call the police.
- If an intruder confronts you, remove yourself from the situation quickly. If you are unable to do this, other strategies may include: negotiating with the intruder; screaming; distracting the intruder to enable your escape; and/or physically defending yourself (using reasonable force).

For further information refer to Dealing with confrontation, p5.

Safety on the internet

The internet has increasingly become part of our daily life. It provides a way for us to connect and communicate with the outside world from within our own home. It can be educational and entertaining and can simplify the daily organisation of our lives.

These benefits come with risks and challenges and it is important that you and your family are protected. Securing your computer, being aware of the hazards and practising safe online behaviour are ways you can minimise your exposure to online risks.

Securing your computer

It's important to secure your computer properly, otherwise you may be putting yourself and possibly your family and friends at risk. Here are some tips to secure your computer.

- Install security software and update it regularly. Install and activate anti-virus, anti-spyware software and install a firewall.
- Turn on automatic updates so all your software receives the latest fixes. New viruses and spyware are created every

day, so it is important that your software is up-to-date and can detect new threats.

- Stop and think before you click on links or attachments in emails. Spam emails often look legitimate but they can be used to carry viruses and other malicious software.
- Before disposing of your computer, remove all traces of your personal data. Special wiping software can be downloaded or purchased to help you clean your hard drive.
- Keep yourself informed about the latest cyber security risks. Subscribe to email notification services that keep you informed about the latest cyber security risks and solutions.
- Backing-up your data can also help you recover your information if a virus destroys your files, or your computer is stolen or damaged.

Protecting yourself

Here are some tips you can follow to make sure you are communicating, banking and shopping safely online.



The internet comes with benefits and risks



Safety out and about

General advice

- Be aware of your surroundings. Especially when using headphones or speaking on your mobile.
- If strangers approach you, use your feelings of safety as a guide. Remove yourself from the situation if you feel unsafe. It is better to be rude than unsafe.
- Carry a mobile phone.
- Avoid areas where you don't feel safe, e.g. short-cuts through parks or vacant land or areas in darkness.
- Walk in the opposite direction to the traffic.
- Where possible, use busy, well-lit streets.
- If confronted by a 'flasher' try to avoid acting shocked or upset, instead take a description and report the incident to police.



Be aware of your surroundings

- Set strong passwords, particularly for important online accounts and change them regularly. Consider making a diary entry to remind yourself.
- Stop and think before you share any personal or financial information about you, your friends or family. Don't disclose identity information (drivers licence, Medicare number, birth date, address) through email or online unless you have initiated the contact and you know the other person involved.
- Limit the amount and type of identity information you post on social networking sites. Don't put sensitive, private or confidential information on your public profile.
- Don't give your email address out unless absolutely necessary. Think about why you are providing it and what the benefit is for you.
- Be very suspicious of emails from people you don't know, particularly if they promise you money, good health or a solution to all your problems. The same applies for websites. Remember, anything that looks too good to be true usually is.
- When shopping online use a secure payment method such as PayPal, BPay, or your credit card. Avoid money transfers and direct debit, as these can be open to abuse. Never send your bank or credit card details via email.

- When using a public computer, don't submit or access any sensitive information online. Public computers may have a keystroke logger installed which can capture your password, credit card number and bank details.
- Encrypt sensitive information. If you keep personal or financial information on your computer, consider taking steps to encrypt and protect sensitive files and folders.

For further information about safety on the internet, visit the Australian Government's *Stay Smart Online* website at www.staysmartonline.gov.au.

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Internet scams

Internet scams can be deceptive with victims often unaware they have occurred. Increasing your knowledge of common internet scams is one way to reduce the likelihood of being scammed.

For comprehensive information about scams refer to the *Little Black Book of Scams* produced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission located at www.accc.gov.au.

Protecting your money and valuables

- Keep cash and valuables you carry to a minimum.
- Use a bag that can be secured, e.g. with a zip.
- Hold your wallet or handbag close to you.
- Carry your bag on the side closest to the buildings, away from the road.
- Avoid leaving your bag in a shopping trolley, on the back of a chair, under a table in public places or on the hook of a door in a public toilet.
- Use ATMs located in public view.
- Check the front of the ATM to ensure there are no signs of tampering.
- Be discreet when entering your personal identification number (PIN).
- Count and secure your money discreetly.



Be discreet when entering your PIN

Consult a timetable
to avoid unnecessary
delays

Safety on public transport

General advice

- Avoid unnecessary waiting and plan your travel by consulting a timetable ².
- Advise a responsible person of your expected arrival and route.
- Wait wherever you feel the most comfortable and safe, such as in a well lit area near other people.
- If you feel your safety is threatened by a fellow passenger:
 - respond assertively, e.g. 'Leave me alone, or I will report you'
 - move
 - seek help from other passengers by asking specific people for assistance rather than making a general call for help
 - activate an emergency button or use an emergency phone, if available
 - report the incident to the bus driver, train guard, police or to the transport company.
- When leaving public transport, be alert to who gets off with you.
- Have a plan to get to your car or home when you get off public transport.

Buses

- Sit wherever you feel the most comfortable and safe. If the bus is empty, or nearly empty, consider sitting near the driver.
- If the driver is threatening your safety, take details of the bus and the driver and report the matter to police and/or the bus company.
- In the case of emergency, emergency phones are available on many busway station platforms.

Trains

- Sit wherever you feel the most comfortable and safe. If the train is empty, or nearly empty, consider sitting near the train guard or driver.
- In an emergency, seek help by alerting the guard or pushing the emergency contact button for assistance.
- Guardian Train services have private security officers on board for the duration of the service. Check your train timetable for details.
- Emergency phones are available at all stations and in some car parks.
- Core Safety Zones (blue-and-white striped safety line on the platform) are waiting areas available at some stations that guarantee a number of security features such as camera surveillance, enhanced lighting and access to an emergency phone.

Note: A number of the safety measures outlined above are applicable for the South East Queensland Rail network only.



Take note of the taxi company and fleet number



Taxis

- Book a taxi (electronically, via phone or SMS) in preference to hailing one. A record is kept by taxi companies of all bookings made.
- If possible, catch a taxi from a Secure Taxi Rank (staffed by experienced taxi rank marshalls and security guards, and in some locations CCTV surveillance is in place).
- Don't get into a taxi if the driver makes you feel uncomfortable. You are within your rights to select another taxi.
- Take note of the taxi company and fleet number (displayed on the inside front windscreen or the left and right guards, adjacent to the doors).
- If you are walking a friend to catch a taxi, consider letting the driver know that you have noted their details e.g., "Look after my friend, Mr/Ms Yellow Cab No.43".
- Some taxi companies allow you to SMS the details of your trip to them, which they record. Contact your local taxi company to determine if this service is available.

In the taxi

- Sit wherever you feel most comfortable and safe. The left rear, diagonally opposite the driver is recommended.
- You are entitled to specify the route you wish to take to reach your destination. Speak up if the driver takes a different route to the one you have specified or are familiar with.
- Stay alert to your surroundings and avoid disclosing personal information to the driver. Let the driver know if you feel the conversation is inappropriate.
- If your safety is being threatened by the taxi driver ask the driver to stop. You may choose to make up an excuse to do so or leave when the taxi stops at a traffic sign or lights.
- **If the driver refuses to stop:**
 - read out the fleet number and advise the driver you will report him/her if they don't stop
 - call out to someone on the street to attract attention and seek assistance
 - scream/yell at the driver to stop
 - do whatever you believe will best preserve your safety.
- When you reach your destination, it is up to you if you would like the driver to use the taxi lights to illuminate the path to your door. You may ask to be dropped a couple of houses away if you are uncomfortable with the driver knowing your address.



Where possible,
catch a taxi from a
Secure Taxi Rank



Have your key ready when you return to your car

Safety in the car

General advice

- Mark your car keys with the QPS property identification code, using: the first initial of your first name; the first initial of your family name; date of birth; and the letter Q which signifies Queensland

e.g. Cameron Edward Peters
Date of birth 01.08.1974
Property ID code - CP010874Q.

- Ensure your car is in good condition and has plenty of oil, petrol, water and sufficient tyre tread to avoid unexpected breakdowns.
- Keep a pen, paper, torch, mobile phone and street directory or GPS in the car.

Parking

- Park in well-lit areas as close as possible to your destination.
- Lock your car whenever leaving it and remove any valuables or ensure they are out of sight.
- Have your key ready when you return to your car to enable quick access. Before you enter check first (including the back seat) to ensure all is in order.

Driving

- Keep doors locked and your valuables out of sight.
- Plan your route. Where possible stay on main roads. If travelling in an isolated area tell someone where you are going and your estimated time of arrival.
- Avoid picking up hitchhikers.
- If you are being followed, or encounter an aggressive motorist, drive to a populated area, such as a police station or service station and seek assistance. It is best not to agitate an aggressive motorist by returning abuse or violent gestures.

Breakdown

If your car breaks down, work out how you will seek help and where you feel the most safe to wait for assistance to arrive. You might:

- If a passing motorist indicates that you should stop, continue driving to a populated area before getting out to check your vehicle. If you do stop to talk with a stranger, stay in the car with the doors locked and engine running and talk through a closed window. Drive away if you feel threatened.
- If stopped by police who are not in uniform and have an unmarked car, ask to see their identification through your closed window.
- If someone gets into your car, try to attract attention and help from others, e.g. drive with the horn on, activate the hazards lights and/or stop somewhere that will attract attention and throw the keys out of the window.
- pull off the road to a safe place (so as not to impede other traffic)
- call for help on a mobile phone and wait either in the locked vehicle or at a nearby populated area
- leave the vehicle to seek help from a nearby house or business. In this instance, take the keys, lock doors and secure your valuables. Trust your instincts. You may feel more comfortable to stay outside and ask the occupant to call for help on your behalf
- if in an isolated area, you may choose to flag down a passer-by and ask for assistance. If you feel more comfortable, return to your vehicle, lock your car and talk through a closed window.



Keep valuables out of sight



If your car breaks down, use a mobile phone to call for help



If possible, when working early or late, walk with a group to your car

Safety in the workplace

General advice

- Be alert for suspicious people hanging around work premises. Check the identity of unknown visitors.
- Restrict access to employee areas and secure personal valuables.
- Avoid giving personal details or business information to strangers.
- Avoid leaving money unattended or unsecured.
- When banking vary the routine (e.g. time and person banking). Be discreet in how you carry the takings.
- Be alert for suspicious packages. Contact police if a suspicious package is received.
- Lock doors and windows in areas that are unoccupied.
- If you are working offsite, tell someone where you are going, who you are with and the estimated time of your return.
- Remove employee identification when leaving the workplace.

Working early or leaving late

If you arrive or leave work in darkness or if you feel unsafe:

- walk with a group, or ask a colleague or security guard to walk you to your car
- arrange a lift with a family member, friend or colleague or be involved in a car pool
- park in a populated, well lit area, as close as possible to your workplace
- stick to routes that are populated and well lit. Do not take shortcuts through dark or isolated areas
- advise someone if you are working late and let them know what time you expect to be home.

Workplace harassment

Harassment is behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates people. Workplace harassment may include verbal and/or written comments, non-verbal actions or physical contact.

If you are being harassed in the workplace consider the following options:

- approach the harasser and tell them to stop the behaviour
- advise your supervisor about the behaviour. *The Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* outlines the responsibilities of both employers and employees to ensure the health and safety of all workers, including their physical and psychological wellbeing
- record details of the harassment and keep any evidence (e.g. e-mails, notes)
- approach an appropriate workplace representative for advice or to take action on your behalf
- where matters of harassment escalate to, or involve discrimination under the provisions of the (*Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*), these matters may be reported to the Anti-Discrimination Commission.



Restrict access to employee areas



Workplace harassment should never be tolerated

Safety in the social scene

Intoxicating substances

Consuming alcohol and other drugs (including illicit drugs and medications) will lessen your judgment, reflexes and awareness of your surroundings. It is also important to understand that being around people who are consuming alcohol or drugs poses a heightened safety threat.

If you are going to be drinking alcohol or are with friends who are, consider the following:

- plan how to get home safely. If you plan to drive, don't drink
- plan ahead and determine how many drinks you will have and stick to the plan. Don't drink to a level where you are no longer in control

- eat before and during drinking to slow the absorption of alcohol into your bloodstream (avoid salty foods)
- alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks
- avoid shouts — drink at your own pace
- avoid mixing drinks
- avoid top-ups — finish each drink before you have another
- get involved in other activities, e.g. dancing or playing pool
- avoid mixing alcohol and drugs (whether they are prescription or non-prescription)
- don't leave the venue with people you don't know or trust – stay with and look after your friends
- avoid situations that may lead to confrontation or conflict.



When drinking alcohol, get involved in other activities.

Spiked drinks

Drink spiking is when alcohol or another substance is added to someone's drink without them knowing, often leaving them seriously vulnerable to abuse within a very short period of time.

Tips you might consider to minimise the risks of drink spiking:

- take your own drinks to parties
- avoid leaving drinks unattended
- only accept drinks from trusted people
- watch your drink being poured
- don't accept an open container of drink from anyone
- if you feel very drunk in a disproportionate amount of time to the amount of drinks that you have consumed, immediately tell a friend or someone in authority
- drink spiking is an offence and should be reported to police.



QPS referrals

Reporting

Some people are reluctant to report incidents, such as those described in this brochure, to police. The QPS encourages all people who have been a victim of crime or witness to a crime to contact police at their earliest opportunity.

Further personal safety information and advice:

- Visit the Queensland Police Service website: www.police.qld.gov.au

- Contact your District Crime Prevention Coordinator via your local police station
- Arrange for a free Personal Safety Awareness Workshop:
 - Personal Safety Awareness Workshops provide attendees with an awareness of safety risks and practical strategies to preserve their safety. These workshops are custom-made to meet audience needs and range from 30 - 90 minutes
 - For further information contact your District Crime Prevention Coordinator.



Call Triple Zero (000) if your life is in danger, there is a serious risk to your safety or property, or a crime is happening now.



Call Policelink 131 444 for non-urgent police assistance 24 hours 7 days a week. Alternatively visit or call your local police station.



Call Crime Stoppers on 1 800 333 000 to provide information about unsolved crimes anonymously. Crime Stoppers Queensland is a registered charity and community volunteer organisation working in partnership with the Queensland Police Service.

How you can help others

If you become aware someone needs assistance, do something.

You can help by:

- calling the police (Triple Zero (000) in an emergency)
- verbally or physically intervening (depending on the circumstances and the perceived threat to your own safety)
- providing support to a friend/acquaintance in need
- referring the person to police or other agencies that may assist them.

While you are developing good safety strategies for yourself, consider making the community safer by:

- being a good neighbour
- being a good safety network member for others
- being friendly, not aggressive (unless your personal safety is threatened)
- reporting personal safety concerns to the police.



Contact the police if you have been a victim of crime or witness to a crime

