

Personal Safety While on Patrol

When on patrol it's important that you take measures to protect your personal safety. Participating in a Citizen Patrol is very rarely dangerous, but it is certainly true that criminals do not like to be watched while they commit crimes. Sometimes they confront Patrol members. As previously mentioned, *patrol members should remain together at all times unless the members can remain in visual contact or radio contact across a parking lot.*

Below is a discussion of some basic principles of personal safety that you can apply to your activities on the Citizen Patrol and other parts of your life as well:

Trust your intuition, and act on it

Your intuition is your internal alarm system that tells you when there is something wrong in your environment. Your intuition may tell you that something is wrong even before you detect the problem through sight, sound, smell, or touch. You may experience intuition as a feeling of dread or doubt, or through physical sensations, such as tightness in the stomach, hair standing on end, or a racing heart. When your intuition tells you that you are in danger, take action! Often, people try to talk themselves out of what they feel ("Don't react. Maybe you're wrong. You don't want to look foolish."), but this is rarely a good idea. Instead, do something to make the situation safer for you and the others on Foot Patrol with you. You could reduce your isolation by walking into a store, or you could cross the street and go the other direction to get away from a situation. If you are face-to-face with a dangerous situation, you can use de-escalation techniques to try to keep the situation calm until you can escape.

Deal with a situation at the lowest & calmest level possible

For optimal safety on your Foot Patrol, it is best to deal with a potentially dangerous situation as soon as it is recognized as such. At the earliest sign of danger, remove yourselves from the situation if possible. There is no reason to wait around to see if your suspicions are confirmed. If something feels bad, it probably is bad, and you don't need to endanger yourself to "make sure." If you are unable to leave the situation right away, you can use de-escalation. De-escalation is a method of calming down a situation or another person. When you are facing an agitated, angry person, the calmer you can get them, the safer it is for you.

Calm yourself

Breathe slowly and deeply. Tell yourself, "I can handle this. I'm going to be OK."

Display a confident & calm demeanor

Make some eye contact, but with a soft gaze, not an intense or constant stare. Keep your face neutral. Keep your posture calm and relaxed but alert. Don't make any sudden movements.

Position yourselves for safety

Stay at least two arm-lengths away from a potentially dangerous person, or position yourselves behind a barrier if possible. Keep your hands free and in front of your body. Look for escape routes.

Use your voice to calm the potential assailant

Keep your voice calm, firm, low, slow, and even. Use short, simple sentences. Avoid complex logic; agitated people cannot understand complicated concepts- they are thinking at a very simple level.

Say things that will help you establish rapport with the potential assailant

Listen actively. Use “uh-huh” and nod. Listen for content and emotion. Really listen to what the person wants and needs. Acknowledge their feelings, agree with them, and empathize (even if you don’t really feel that way). Project sincerity. “It looks like we startled you when we came around the corner. I’m sorry. We didn’t mean to.”

Avoid escalating behaviors

Examples: ignoring, making threats, hurtful remarks, arguing, commanding, shouting, interrupting, personal space invasions, threatening gestures, obscenities, self righteous attitude, taking away their dignity. Remember, in a dangerous situation you don’t need to be right; you need to be safe.



Recognize the strategies that assailants commonly use & pre-plan your defense

There are some common strategies that assailants use against the person/ people they attack or harass. Here is a description of how these common strategies might be used against your patrol group in a street situation, and what might help in each case.

Assailant strategy: Isolation

It is much easier for an assailant to attack someone who is isolated and alone, and the assailant is less likely to be caught.

What might help: Stay connected with others

- You have a built-in buddy system with a Citizen Patrol, so you’re never alone.

- Identify some safe places to go for help when you are out on your route, e.g. stores, bars, supermarkets, fire stations, police stations.
- Use the Patrol's cell phone to make a call. This shows that help is not far away.
- Having checked in with the precinct means there are people out there who know where you are.

Assailant strategy: *Surprise*

Physical surprise: Assailant hides behind something and jumps out, or approaches very quickly. Psychological surprise: When someone we never expected to be violent is violent. This is often the result of stereotypes about who is/is not a criminal based on race, income level, educational level, neighborhood, etc.

What might help: *Be hard to surprise*

- Stay aware of surroundings. This means visual awareness (look all around you), and auditory awareness (listen to what's going on around you).
- Respond to gut feelings about behavior rather than stereotypes about appearance.

Assailant strategy: *Intimidation*

Intimidation can be very obvious (pointing a weapon, saying something threatening) or more subtle (leaning over someone, clenching jaw muscles, angry facial expressions, putdowns, etc.) Sometimes assailants try to intimidate people into not making any noise during an assault or not reporting an incident. Assailants are often "power trippers," who try to make others feel small and powerless so they can feel big and powerful by comparison.

What might help: *Try to show that you are not afraid, even if you are*

- Breathe slowly and deeply, and tell yourself you're going to be OK, that you handle the situation.
- Respond in ways that maintain your dignity and do not escalate the interaction. This could be as subtle as standing up straight, making some brief eye contact, and trying to calm someone down.

Communicate with your fellow patrol members.

Before going out with your fellow patrol members, it's a good idea to have an agreed upon way of handling incidents, so that you don't have to figure it out in the moment.

- Some patrols set up a code word for dangerous situations. For example, a word could be selected to mean, "This is dangerous and we need to leave now."
- Some patrols arrange in advance who will do what in an emergency situation. The person with the best verbal skills could be the one that tries to calm down the situation. Another person could be the one who calls 911.

The 5 D's of Self-Defense

Decide not to be a victim. Use Preparation and planning prior to an act of aggression. Learn about criminal behavior and train to respond to acts of aggression. Practice avoidance and risk reduction. Be aware that risk exists. Make and follow a safety plan.

You can even take a self-defense class. Overall, awareness and avoidance are the first steps in a self-defense plan.

Deter and prevent aggression. Learn how to deescalate a confrontation. Project confidence with body language. Be assertive but not condescending. Practice situational awareness. Respond to warnings of intuition. Keep a buffer of space and barrier between you and the threatening subject(s) if possible. Police are trained to understand that a person with a knife can run 21-feet towards an officer before the officer can unholster, aim and shoot his/her handgun. It's ok to deceive when necessary for your safety.

Disrupt the aggressor. At the onset of the violent action, use any means necessary to stop the attack. Almost any object can be used as a weapon; pens, sticks, clipboards etc.. Do not engage in a lengthy struggle with the aggressor; it will likely lead to injury. Create an opportunity to escape.

Disengage and get away. Create an ending to the aggression. Evade and escape. Don't corner the aggressor. Flee to safety. Sometimes fleeing towards a group of people may deter the aggressor.

Debrief and discuss the incident afterwards. Be aware that a criminal or civil investigation may be brought against you. Preserve evidence. Take photos of the scene and any injuries. Promote physical and emotion healing. Get legal advice and learn resilience.

Confrontational Simulation

Members will be given real-life scenarios that test quick thinking and de-escalation skills in the safety of a training environment. Scenarios may include: being confronted by an angry citizen, being flagged down about an argument or a fight in a parking lot, being confronted by a "car prowler" suspect or being told that a citizen waved a gun at some bystanders. Even when not involved in training, Citizen Patrollers should mentally role play or rehearse "what if" scenarios in their mind. This way, when you are actually confronted with a stressful encounter, you'll have already "been there" in your mind and you'll be able to react more confidently.

Health Hazards

"If it's wet or sticky don't touch it". If you encounter a sick or injured person, you shall render aid only to the extent of your training. If you aren't trained in CPR or a particular skill, you may be civilly liable for additional injuries that you may cause. DO attempt to determine that there is no longer a hazard to responders or bystanders (i.e. an electrical line down, a chemical leak, passing cars etc.). Call 911 and relay relevant information to the dispatcher. It's important to remain calm and professional so as not to alarm the sick or injured person. It's recommended that you do not touch the injured person, however if you do, you must wear personal protective equipment (latex gloves and potentially protective glasses).