



Situational Awareness Bulletin: Situational Awareness & 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 how they impact each other
- 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 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 follow you, raising your level of suspicion towards them. The fact is, now you've noticed it and are invested in your personal safety.

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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





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Recommendation: Be Present and Alert

Another 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 can probably relate to a train commute they’ve taken where they have spent their entire trip looking in their phones or used 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 contributor for many cell phone “snatches” that occur when people are focused in their mobile devices while standing near subway doors. As the doors close, a criminal element will snatch the phone and flee to the shock of an unaware and unprepared victim. Remaining present at all times during your commute 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



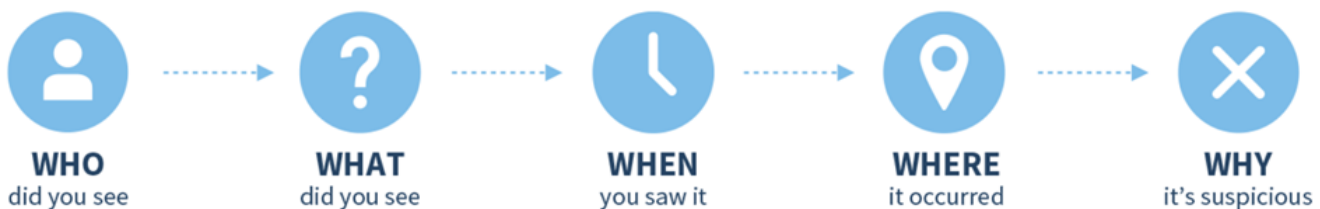
Recommendation: See Something, Say Something!

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 encouraged to seek local resources.**

- 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, one can also call 888-NYC-SAFE
- To locate an non-NYS reporting number, out of state residents can 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

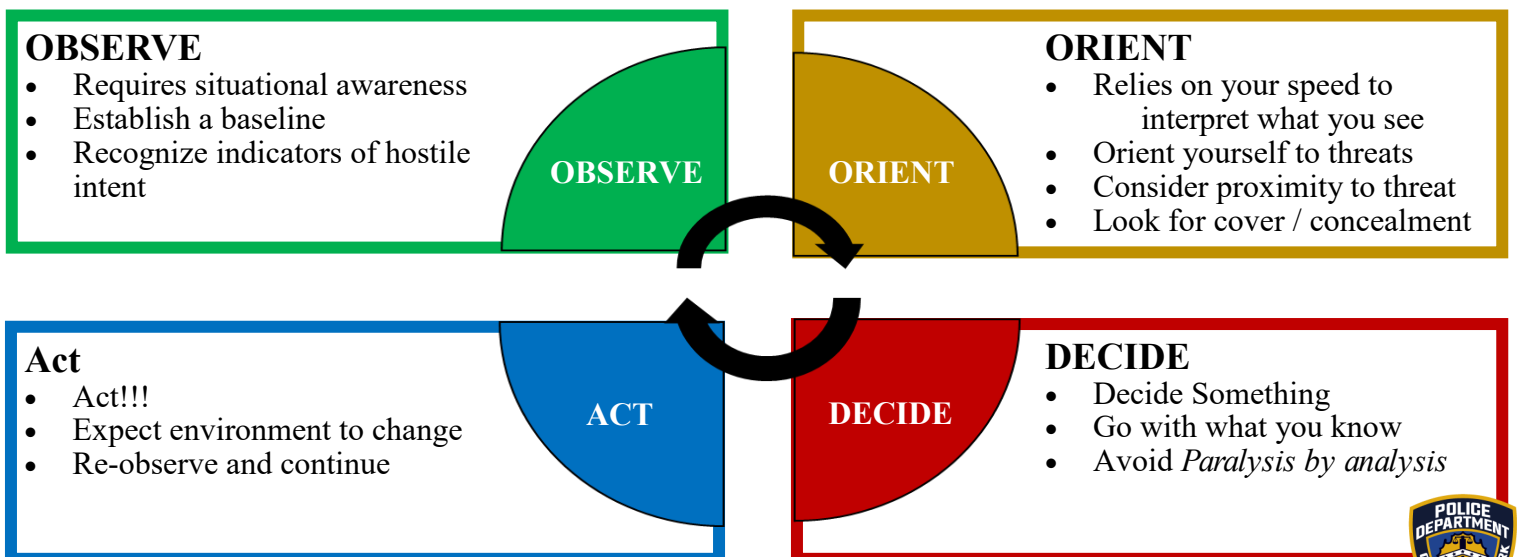
While practicing good situational awareness, we may fail to focus on the entire environment. It is human nature to notice the things closest to oneself. This recommendation encourages you to extend that awareness to a greater distance than what you may be accustomed to. Focusing to a greater distance will provide you with increased opportunities to move in a new direction or prepare for a potential confrontation. Look ahead to plan ahead.



- Allow your environment to impact your decision making
- Look for exit routes
- Look for police, security, or another authority that may be of help if needed
- Look for suspicious people or others to avoid
- Look for hazards to avoid including any non-criminal elements (puddles, potholes, don't walk signals, 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?” These are “bad day” scenarios that can help us prepare and hopefully never need to use. Keep in mind, decision making is complex and requires adjustments based on the new information after we make the initial decisions. 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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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 look through the criminal’s eyes and see what they might see. 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 appearances of less vulnerability. As you read them, you will see many relate to each other.

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, jewelry, etc.)

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

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

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 in your GPS device so you can reduce time searching for it
- Better to ask for directions from a trustworthy source than to spend a prolonged amount of time on your phone trying to orient yourself (it can reduce your situational awareness)

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

Lastly, if you are under the effects of a substance (i.e. alcohol) that could greatly reduce your cognitive abilities, consider more private and secure means of commuting such as an Uber or pickup by a friend.



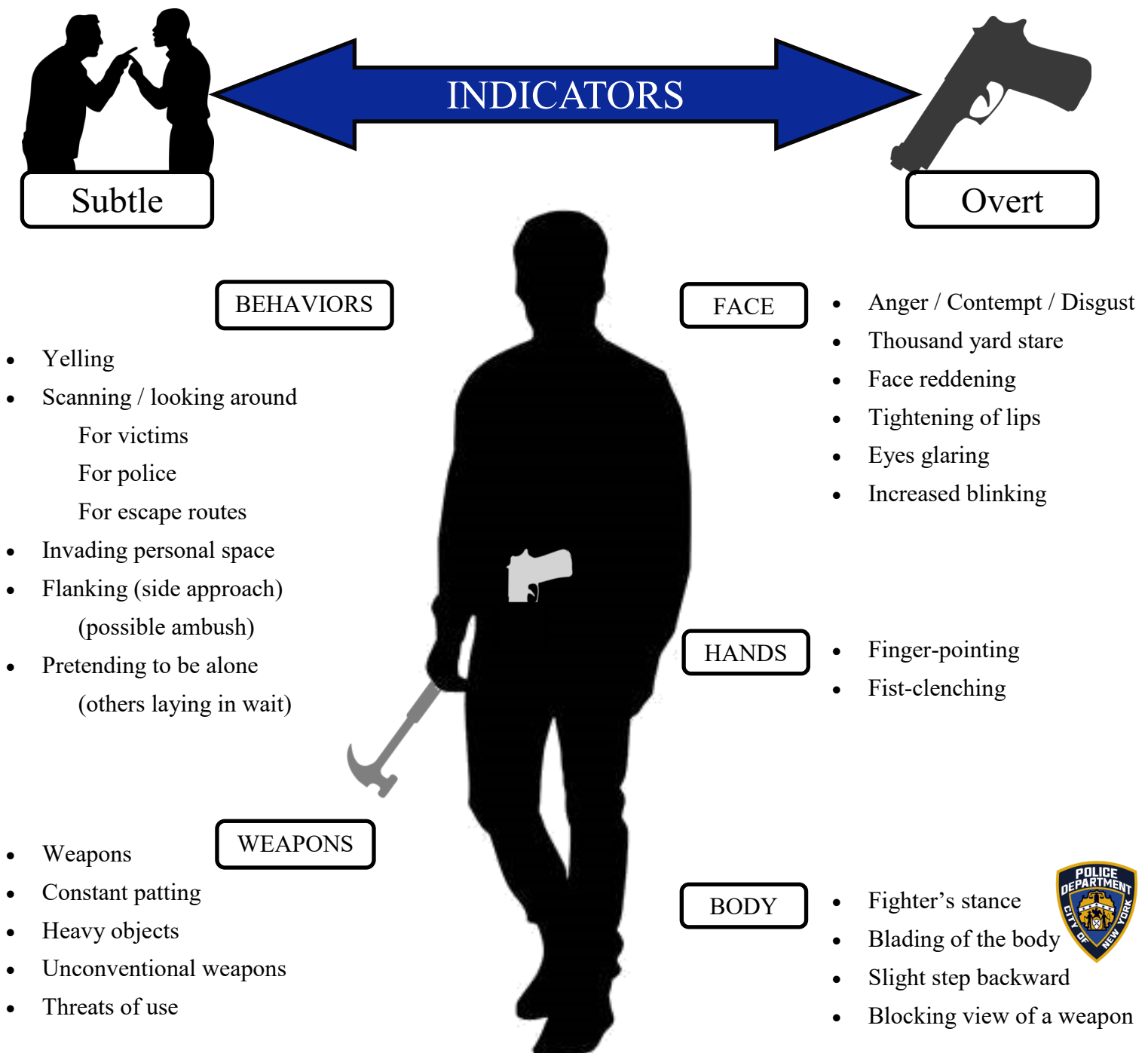


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Recommendation: Look For Indicators of Aggression, Hostile Intent, and Possession of a Weapon

Below is a list, in no specific order, of some possible indicators. There are many 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 internalize these (and others) and consider them when practicing your “what-if” scenarios.





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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. Additionally, some altercations and incidents are beyond our control. Accepting this and adopting the proper mindset to plan ahead (and be prepared) will help you “harden the target”. Each of us should invest in our own personal safety and can benefit from the following suggestions.

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, to avoid being pushed on to the tracks, can also apply to a sidewalk curb to avoid being accidentally nudged into oncoming traffic.

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 be less “opportunistic” and more “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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. 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 others and 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, reporter, 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 or into traffic)
- 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 as loud as you can
- 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

