

PRETTY DEADLY SELF DEFENSE

SAFETY TIPS

Situational Awareness

How to continue enjoying all the things we love about life, but keep ourselves safer, too.

'May you live in interesting times,' is an old Chinese saying that is more of a passive-aggressive curse than a heartfelt blessing. We seem to be living in very interesting times these days, and that can often make us feel paranoid, anxious, and helpless. Situational Awareness is the ability to identify, process, and comprehend the critical elements of information about what is happening with regards to a mission - it is used by governments, military, and Jason Bourne. More simply, it's knowing what is going on around you, and you can use it too.

Here are a few easy tips and techniques anyone can do at any time, to help stay calm, smart and *aware*.

Relaxed Alert: Look up from your smartphone, don't zone out, open your eyes, ears, and nose, and calmly scan your environment to take in what's going on - not just what you see, but what you hear (or don't hear), smell and feel. But stay relaxed - this way, you'll maintain an open focus, which allows you to take in more information about what's going on around you.

Baseline: Every environment has a "baseline" - what's normal for that place and time, and for the people who are using that place (people dancing at a club, people quietly chatting in a coffee shop). Once you are aware of a baseline, it's easier for you to spot **anomalies** - things that *shouldn't* happen but do, or things that SHOULD be there or happen, but are missing. These anomalies are indicators that something is wrong, and you should exit that place as quickly and calmly as possible.

Physicalities: The way you feel can alert you to anomalies too: you have a vague feeling of dread or fear that you can't place your finger, you have anxiety that feels different from other forms of anxiety (heavier, or maybe "buzzier"), nausea, sudden change in body temperature, or tension in one area of your body for no reason. Or you are suddenly thinking about something you normally don't, and that feels like it comes out of nowhere: a song stuck in your head (pay attention to the lyrics), assessing that people are not a threat, terrorists. You may find yourself tensing up, and looking behind you. Your hearing and vision seem sharper. These are ways that our bodies alert us to anomalies and a perceived threat.

Trust Your Gut: If something feels wrong, then it is. Even if the potential threat seems far away from you (across the club, several meters up the street), if you feel in your gut that something's not right, don't question it: never ever EVER question your gut. We have neurosensors in our gut that receive information from the brain and literally give us a "gut feeling". If you can't tell whether you're having a gut feeling or you're being paranoid, try to take a calming breath and check again.

What do you do with these feelings and observations? Acknowledge them, and thank your body for having such a sophisticated defense system! Then practice awareness: be aware of your body, where it is in relation to your surroundings; take note of exits and entrances, as well as places that may be blocked in a sudden crowd, or notice places that are good places to hide; etc. You can be aware and start making plans -- remember, when we know we have options, we have power. *And you always have options.*

