

# FOR SAFETY'S SAKE, TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

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## Q & A With a Personal Safety Expert

*By Jeanne Bellezzo*

*You are walking through a parking garage and notice someone in the shadows. Maybe you get a weird “vibe” from a man on the elevator. Are you being paranoid? Or should you take action?*

J.J. Bittenbinder, a renowned personal safety expert and 23-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, makes his living teaching people how to protect themselves against violent crime. His valuable advice could save our life.

### **What are the most common misconceptions about safety?**

The big one is, “It can’t happen to me.” Not true. Crime happens to anyone, in any neighborhood, in any city. Also, you’re most responsible for your safety. Not the police or the security guard. You must take steps to prevent yourself from becoming a victim, and watch out for others who may need help.

### **What type of victim do criminals look for?**

The easiest one. If three women are walking down the street, and one has her purse bouncing along behind her, one has it strapped across her body, and the third has it strapped across her body underneath her coat, the first one will be the target every time – not because she’s older, younger or weaker, but because she’s the most vulnerable. If you seem tougher than the next one, you don’t get picked.

### **What can you do to appear less vulnerable?**

Walk with your head up. Women, especially, tend to look down and away when they pass a man to discourage unwanted remarks. But that says, “I’m vulnerable.” Instead, keep your head up, make a disinterested “sweep” across his face and look over his shoulder, as if someone is there. You’ve acknowledged him, and you don’t look vulnerable.

Always be aware of what’s going on around you. The sooner you see what’s happening, the more time you have to react.

### **How can you prepare for an attack?**

Have a plan. The bad guy’s got a plan. He knows what he’s going to do, say, take, and where he’s going to run. He’s ready; so you have to be ready too.

### **What should your plan include?**

First, deny privacy. Don't let the bad guy get you alone. Try to stay in a group. If you think you're being followed, drive to a police station, gas station or anywhere there are people. If you're on foot, cross the street. If he follows you over, walk down the middle of the street.

### **What about places where you find yourself alone, like parking garages and elevators?**

Learn to manage potentially dangerous places. In the restroom, check under the doors for shoes that don't belong there. Avoid secluded ATMs. In a parking structure, get an escort to your vehicle. Don't like who's on the elevator? Don't get on. If you're on along and don't like who gets on, get off.

### **But won't you appear paranoid or possibly offend someone who's harmless?**

Don't worry about what the guy on the elevator thinks. Your safety is more important. Trust your instincts. When the hair on the back of your neck stands up, that's 200 million years of evolution grabbing you and telling you to get out of there!

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