

# Personal Safety for Women

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Everyone needs to feel safe. Women often face challenges and dangers that are different than for a man. Whether you're dealing with domestic violence, sexual harassment, child safety or even dating, women need the information for being better prepared to deal with those dangers. Safety for women of all ages is necessary and can vary from uncomfortable situations to life-threatening ordeals. Some examples of these situations are related to:

- Workplace Harassment
- Dating and Relationship Building
- Home Related Safety
- Elderly Abuse
- Crisis Intervention
- Fraud, ID Theft and the Internet
- Child Safety
- Animal Abuse

Women of every age face the threat of violence. Current estimates indicate that 1 in 5 girls is sexually abused and that the peak ages of such abuse are 8 to 12 years. The prevalence of rape in the United States is estimated to be 1 in every 4 women, with the peak incidence between ages 18 and 24 years. Domestic violence, or partner abuse, will involve 1 in 5 women at some time in their adult lives, generally between the ages of 24 and 32 years. Pregnancy appears to be a particularly vulnerable period, and data indicate that 1 in 6 pregnant women is physically or sexually assaulted during her pregnancy. Also, elder abuse is estimated to involve as many as 1 in every 20 persons older than 65 years of age. The prevalence of elder abuse tends to increase with age, peaking among the "old-old," that is, those who are most frail and dependent.<sup>1</sup>

No one has the right to hurt you. If you experience any kind of transgression that makes you feel uncomfortable or threatened, you need to report these to the police immediately. Physical/sexual assault, domestic violence, acquaintance rape and crimes using various weapons are becoming an ever-present threat to women. Levels of harm to children and pets are a part of this cycle which may be used to threaten your personal safety.

Know what strengths you possess. If you are confronted with a hostile circumstance, don't panic and lose control of the situation. Getting away has to be first priority. Know escape routes from every room in the home or any location where attack takes place. Yell, scream and make as much of a scene as possible.

Domestic violence is not just physical. There may be psychological, sexual, mental and economic abuse, as well. There is always a progression of violence and abuse in an abusive relationship. Have a plan in place for leaving, have documents, keys, money, etc. in one location where they can be reached quickly. Leaving the abuser is not always the end of the danger. Plans must be in place to protect the target from separation violence. Victims must work with law enforcement, advocates, counselors, and prosecuting attorney.

A woman's risk of being raped by someone they know *is four times greater* than your risk of being raped by a stranger. When out with someone you do not know well, meet in a public place and let friends/family know where you are and when you will be back. Spokane police say there has been an increase of reports from women who think they have been victims of illicit "date-rape" drugs used to leave them incoherent, sometimes so they can be easily raped.<sup>2</sup> GHB (Gamma-hydroxybutyric acid) has reportedly been used in cases of date rape. Because GHB is odorless and tasteless, it can be slipped into someone's drink without detection. Watch drinks in public, never leave your drink out of sight.

It is up to you to be cognizant of what can be done to avoid becoming a victim. Don't be another statistic! Take responsibility to educate yourself and your family on personal safety. Spokane C.O.P.S. has an extensive network of preventive resources available to help you deal with circumstances before they get out-of-control. Please go to Spokane C.O.P.S. website at [www.spokanecops.org](http://www.spokanecops.org) to access hundreds of resources and educational pieces to help protect you and your family.

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<sup>1</sup> **McFarlane J, Parker B, Soeken K, Bullock L.** Assessing for abuse during pregnancy. Severity and frequency of injuries and associated entry into prenatal care. JAMA. 1992; 267:3176-8. Violence against women. Relevance for medical practitioners. Council of Scientific Affairs, American Medical Association. JAMA. 1992; 267:3184-9.

<sup>2</sup> By Isamu Jordan, Staff writer Spokesman, 9/9/05.