

# SAFETY FIRST

A l t e r n a t i v e s t o F e a r

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## SAFETY WHILE PARKING

Parking presents fairly complex safety problems for a number of reasons. Many of us have found ourselves in a situation in which we drive around looking for a well-lit parking place close to our destination, and end up parking the car in a less than ideal location because that's all that is available. It may also be that you choose a pretty good parking place and come back to find conditions have changed. This is particularly true with parking garages where you avoid parking next to vans or trucks, and return to find that the small cars you parked near have been replaced by vans with black tinted windows.

Locking and unlocking your car door, getting in and out of the car, loading and unloading packages are all activities that take our attention away from safety as we concentrate on our tasks. Depending on where we're going or coming from, or how late we're running, we may also have our minds on subjects other than safety. With a little care and concentration, we can do a lot to enhance our safety while parking. Our efforts will cluster in two areas: (1) Gathering information about what is going on around us; and (2) Maximizing our resources for escape, getting help, and resistance.

One of the most important principles in safety precautions is that everything you plan for yourself should be consistent with your lifestyle and personal values. What follows is a set of suggestions, not a list of rules. Only you can make the decisions that constitute your safety plan. (Read all the suggestions, even if they're for an area not applicable to you. We won't repeat suggestions that can be carried from one section to another.)

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### Lighting

- When parking at night, or expecting to return to your car after dark, try to park in a well-lit area.

#### Obstacles

- Avoid parking next to obstacles that would block your vision of potential assailants, i.e., vans, dumpsters, shrubbery.

#### Escape Routes

- Try to ensure that you have an escape route for yourself on foot in case you have to run away from your car.
- Position your car for a quick exit if necessary. (Having to back out of a space slows you down.)

#### Be Observant

- As you approach your car, before you get out of the car, before you unlock your car, look around. (One oil company has a television spot advertising a booklet on safety that has a woman getting down on her hands and knees to look under her car. We recommend that you avoid putting yourself in a weak position to look for danger; it's usually

better to stay on your feet.)

#### Be Prepared

- As you approach your car, have your keys out so that you don't have to fish for them. (We don't recommend that you arrange your keys between your fingers so that you could strike an assailant with them. Such an action could injure your hand. Keep your punching hand free; carry the keys in the other.)

#### Help Each Other

- Walk to parking with a friend. If you're not parked near each other, you can walk to one car and drive the second person to hers. Wait until she's got her car started and has given you a signal (like blinking her lights) that everything is OK before you drive away. (We strongly recommend a signal that all is OK rather than expecting her to signal you if she's in trouble. If she's attacked she might not have time to give you a distress signal.)

### PARKING LOTS

#### Attended Lots

- If the attendant parks your car, remove your car key from the

rest of your keys so that you can give the attendant only your car key.

- If you do the parking, park near the attendant's booth if possible.

- Be careful of the information you give the attendant or leave in your car, particularly your home address.

- If you pay by check, make sure that your home address is not on your check. (We recommend a post office box, work address or some other substitute.)

#### Unattended Lots

- If you park in a lot with a collection box for parking fees, get your money out before you get out of your car. Be observant of movement around you as you slip the money into the slot.

#### PARKING GARAGES

- Note the location of stairwells, elevators, entrances, and exits—if you're running away from an assailant you want to know where to go.

- Note the location of any telephones or emergency signals. Find out what response there would be if you pulled a fire alarm in an emergency.

- Plan your route walking away from your car so that you can avoid pillars, corners, and other places that someone could hide.

- Park your car so that there is room between it and the wall so that you have an escape route if you have to run away from an assailant.

- If your first action when you get to your car is to load parcels into a trunk or hatchback, park so that the rear of your car is away from the wall so that you're doing that action in relatively open space. If your first action would be to unlock the driver's door, or to seat a child, put that part of the car near the open space. (You want to avoid being trapped in that narrow lane between two cars, especially if it's closed on one end by a wall.)

- While waiting for the elevator, position yourself so that you can see movement around you as much as possible.

- If you take the stairs, make sure that the exit doors are not locked.

#### ON THE STREET

- If you're not sure which direction to go after you park, figure that out before you get out of the car.

- If you've parked at a meter, get your coins out before you get out of the car.

- While you're putting coins in a meter, be aware of movement around you, particularly any unusual movement. In some areas panhandlers target people putting money in parking meters. If you want to give money to the homeless on the street, get it out before you exit the car and be ready to give it when you're approached. (It's OK to ask the person not to stand too close to you.) If you're not going to give to someone who approaches you on the street, be ready to stop them before they get close to you.

#### AT HOME

- If you park in a garage, try to arrange things so that you can see into the garage before you enter it, or at least before you get out of your car.

- Make sure that your neighbors know what sort of distress signal you would give if you needed help (blowing the horn, yelling, etc.).

- Try to make the path from car to door as clear and well-lit as possible.

- Be alert to any changes or unusual movement before getting out of your car, and while loading or unloading the car.

#### PREPARING FOR RESISTANCE OR ESCAPE

- Get a friend to foot race with you to your car. See if you can beat her/him to the car and get the door unlocked, get inside, and lock the door before s/he gets to you. This will give you an idea of whether you should run to your car, run away, or resist at certain points.

- Be mentally prepared to drop packages if you have to flee or resist.

- Instruct your children as to what to do in an emergency.

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