



PREVENTION & AVOIDANCE

Module 4

It is popularly believed that violence is unpredictable. This perception is often the result of news reports that only show the violence and aftermath rather than discussing the background that led to a particular act of violence.

While the rate of violent crime has dropped recently, the fear of violence is still high and in some regions of the country, rates of violence are increasing.

Although random acts of violence do occur, it is often possible to predict whether or not an individual will become violent or is planning to attack you.

While this isn't a "hard" science and may not always work, understanding these concepts may help keep you out of harms way.

External signs - Behaviours and cues to look for in others are:

Increased agitation or anxiety. Often a person will appear unsettled and display pent-up energy directed into meaningless activities. The person also might display an increase in their rate of breathing and sweating.

Loss of rationality.

Acting out. Such behaviour might include verbal aggression or threatening movements either with their body or weapons or potential weapons.

Excessive emotional attention directed your way such as loud talk, argumentative and angry statements.

During interviews, **the individual conspicuously ignores you.**

Shows contempt toward you. One way this is done is with a "**look through stare**". This is a stare where they look through you rather than at you.

Muscular tension or abrupt stopping of all movement. Watch for the shoulders to shift due to increased muscular tension.

Shifting into a "boxers" stance or "martial arts" type stance. Watch for a shift of feet, hips and balance adjustment. Also, watch for clenching of fists.

Target glance. Except for highly skilled fighters, most people will look at a target prior to striking or kicking.

Moves inside your personal space or your boundaries. A person who is targeting you for violence or other criminal acts will often move inside your personal space.

For most this is 18 inches to 4 feet. The size of personal space varies by situation, individual, and culture.

Internal signs - All animals have the "flight or fight" response. Pay attention to your own body's warning signals which can include:

A "gut feeling" that something is not right.

A feeling of fear even if there may be no obvious cause.

Fear can manifest itself in many ways including an increased rate of breathing, sweaty palms, and "butterflies" in the stomach or an "adrenalin" rush.

It does no good to feel fear all the time, however, fear is a useful part of us because it can keep us out of danger.

Pay attention to fear. Then take action.

· **A history of violence.** If a person responds with violence to life events, it is likely that violent behaviour will be seen in this person again.

It is generally agreed that a good predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.

A history of drug and alcohol use or abuse. Violent behaviour is often correlated to the use or abuse of alcohol or drugs.

Not surprisingly, violence is also higher in places where drugs are readily available since this is also where other problems such as street gangs and guns often co-exist.

A history of mental disorder with violent behaviour.

Recently had a major life upset such as a divorce, death in the family, loss of a job, etc. Under times of stress, a person may be more likely to act out in violent ways.

You often hear that assertiveness in walking, standing, talking, eye contact, etc. will help reduce the likelihood of being targeted and assaulted by a criminal. While this advice makes a great deal of sense, and is probably true, it would be nice to know if the idea is supported by research.

Research in this area falls into two general categories:

Comparing the psychosocial profiles of survivors of assault to either non-assaulted subjects or survivors of an attempted assault; Analysis of non-verbal cues to isolate behaviours that are interpreted as conveying vulnerability to assault.

Are Survivors of Assault Different from Survivors of Attempted Assault or Non-assaulted People?

What are the Non-verbal Cues That Convey Vulnerability?

Several studies have examined how nonverbal cues affect perceptions of submissiveness and vulnerability.

Grayson and Stein (1981) made black and white videotapes (no sound) of 60 people walking in New York City.

The videotaping was done at the same location for all people and was done without the knowledge of the videotaped individuals.

The taped subjects were divided into 4 groups (men who appeared under 35, men who appeared over 40, women who appeared under 35, women who appeared over 40).

A scoring system to rank assault potential was developed with the aid of 12 prison inmates incarcerated for violent assaults.

Videotapes were then shown to 53 prison inmates (out of 80 solicited) incarcerated for a variety of violent assaults.

They were asked to rank assault potential of each person on the videotape. Each of the 4 groups had individuals perceived as easy victims.

An equal number from each group was chosen to fill the non-victim group.

The movement of each was analysed using Lab analysis.

This analysis looks at a variety of movement characteristics including: stride, arm movement, tempo, uprightness, weight shift, gaze, head movement, type of walk, and energy in the movement.

Under the conditions of this study, only 4 of these characteristics showed significant differences between the victim and non-victim groups.

These were: type of weight shift, body movement, type of walk, and foot movement.

Essentially, people in the non-victim group tended to move with a normal stride and with postural movement; that is they moved their entire body with coordination rather than each part (hand, arm, leg, foot, head, etc.) moving in an uncoordinated manner.

People in the victim group tended to move in a non-synchronous or anti-synchronous manner with a stride that was either too long or too short for their height.

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External signs - Behaviours and cues to look for in others are:

Write down some of your ideas on external signs leading up to violence

- I.N. Increased agitation or anxiety
- Loss of rationality.
- Excessive emotional attention directed your way
- Shows contempt
- Muscular tension
- Shifting into a "boxers" stance or "martial arts" type stance
- Target glance.
- Moves inside your personal space or your boundaries.
- Internal signs

NOTES: