

Ellis Weinberger <ew206@cam.ac.uk> wrote this on 9 January 2011, and revised it on 16 January 2011, and on 1 March 2011.

1 Thinking as you move: Observation skills and personal safety

When we are watching our neighbourhood, we need to keep our focus outwards. By focusing on our environment, we can see the signs of problems early, and take steps to avoid trouble. By taking steps early, we reduce risk to ourselves and to our neighbours.

Here are some exercises which can make us pay attention to our environment. They are based on methods used in rehabilitation after brain injury, and on drills which help people fly and drive safely.

The exercises consist of questions. Ask yourself these questions whenever you can. These questions train you to keep your attention focused outwards and on the situation.

1. Who is near me?
2. What are they doing?
3. Where would they hide?

1.1 Who is near me?

Look 360 degrees around you, every few breaths, to see and notice all the people near you. Describe them by asking yourself questions such as:

1. What are they wearing?
2. What is the shape of their face?
3. What is the registration number of their vehicle?

Asking these kinds of questions forces you to notice the people around you, and to look more alert. If you notice suspicious people earlier, you buy time to deal with the situation. By looking alert, you make yourself safer.

1.2 What are they doing?

Describe the behaviour of the people around you, by asking yourself questions such as:

1. How well does their behaviour fit the time and the location?
2. How good is their location for observing people?
3. How much attention are they paying to you?

By asking these kinds of questions, you learn which behaviour is normal, and which behaviour is suspicious. As soon as you notice suspicious behaviour, you can take steps to reduce the risk.

1.3 Where would they hide?

Wherever you go, ask yourself where you can stand, and how you can walk, to enable you to see people approaching:

1. From which direction could someone surprise you?
2. Where would someone stand in order to surprise you?
3. Where are the blind corners, doorways and parked cars?

Ask these kinds of questions to notice places where you can be surprised, and to keep your distance from such places. If you keep your distance from places where you can be surprised, you will be safer.

2 Summary

We can reduce crime in our neighbourhoods, and reduce risk to ourselves, by asking ourselves the right kinds of questions. These exercises help us notice the people around us, determine if their behaviour is suspicious, and stay away from places where we can be surprised.