

October 2025

A Safer Naper --- Situational Awareness

Naperville's reputation as a safe city continues to be, in part, because of the community's commitment to crime prevention. This month, in celebration of that commitment, NPD's Safer Naper campaign will join the National Crime Prevention Council in recognizing October as "Crime Prevention Month."

One significant contributor to crime prevention is being aware of your surroundings, also known as situational awareness. It may sound easy, but with the speed at which our lives move these days and the number of distractions we encounter on a regular basis, it's far more difficult than one might realize.

Naperville is a safe community, but it's not a crime free community. Practicing situational awareness can help prevent crime, avoid accidents and be prepared for anything. Here are a few tips to help you hone this personal safety skillset:

- **Learn to predict events.** The most effective aspect of situational awareness involves the ability to project the future actions of elements around you. Use this information to think ahead and determine how it will affect future actions and events in the environment.
- **Identify elements around you.** Start by noticing the threats that surround you. Then expand your awareness to other non-threatening elements. This is the most basic level of situational awareness where you begin to monitor, detect and recognize multiple situational elements. These include objects, events, people and environmental factors.
- **Keep your head up.** Walking with your eyes glued to a mobile device or other distraction significantly decreases your ability to take in what's happening around you or notice potential danger.
- **Use your peripheral vision.** This takes practice but try maintaining your point of focus while using your peripheral vision to monitor a wider degree of space to be more aware of what's happening around you.
- **Don't just look. See.** We all scan a room when we enter, but are you taking notice of where the exits are, whether there are any unattended or out-of-place objects around or if you notice anyone acting suspiciously?
- **Use reflective surfaces.** Instead of looking *through* a store window to the merchandise inside, look *at* the window to see the reflection of what's behind you or outside of your peripheral vision.
- **Limit situational overload.** Overload causes distraction, increases errors and high stress. Prioritizing, delegating tasks and minimizing distractions can improve survival during times of overload.
- **Actively prevent fatigue.** Fatigue affects your ability to watch for possible danger or difficulties. By adopting proactive strategies, you can minimize the chances of experiencing fatigue and maintain optimal energy levels.
- **Clear your mind.** When in confusion, you tend to overlook clues that could help you. You get distracted, make mistakes and increase the confidence of a potentially threatening person.
- **Avoid complacency.** Assuming everything is under control will affect your vigilance. You have to actively keep yourself in the right mindset. When things are slow, or tasks are routine complacency usually occurs. The worst part is the slow creep of complacency is hardly ever

noticed except in hindsight. Continue to challenge yourself and those around you to be prepared for contingencies. Do a mental check every now and then.

- **Use your senses.** One of the excellent ways to improve your situational awareness is to turn on your senses. You need to utilize sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste to strengthen your power of observation.
- **Trust your instincts/feelings.** Your inner self has a way of alerting you to potential danger. You just have to listen to it. If you are uncomfortable for any reason, remove yourself from the situation, speak up to a friend/coworker/store employee or, if you think a crime is about to be committed, call 9-1-1.
- **Continually assess the situation.** When you are in a survival situation always be prepared for changes around you. Continually assess and reassess the situation to determine if you are giving yourself the best possible chance for survival. Learn what nature, land, and new tasks are telling you, before you find yourself in a difficult situation.

By practicing situational awareness, you can avoid being in dangerous situations and even identify criminal behavior. The more aware we are of what's going on around us, the less opportunity there will be for accidents, crimes or other unfortunate circumstances.