

The “It won’t happen to me” syndrome



Please contact me through my website if you would like to use this article. I'm happy to give permission; I just like to know where it is used.

Have you thought about how vulnerable you are when you step into the privacy of someone’s home? What do complete strangers know about you? Do you feel you are safe because you work in nice neighborhoods?

Personal Safety is not something most people want to have to think about on a regular basis. However, if you work alone or visit clients in their homes, thinking about ways to make your job safer can actually help you relax and have less apprehension and fear.

Many people that make home visits have the “It won’t happen to me” syndrome. Because their clients live in an affluent area or because nothing bad has happened, they feel they are safe. But this does not mean you are protected from someone with an un-medicated mental imbalance or a drug problem. If the client is wealthy, it just means they will have better lawyers to get them out of any trouble they might cause! Home visitors of all ages (visiting clients of all demographics) have experienced robbery, theft, stalking, verbal abuse, sex crimes, sexual harassment, physical abuse, threats and murder. There are also dangers that may not be crime related that should be considered: health emergencies, visitors or other employees of the client that may have issues with you, pets that could bite or scratch, hazards like ice or wet floors and even a residential fire. Do you have a plan for these situations?

When a person first starts to think of their safety, it is usually the dreaded “What-if’s” that are considered. It is easy to get overwhelmed and to say “it won’t happen to me”. But if you only think about what could happen, and don’t have solutions, you are left feeling vulnerable. However, if you are not willing to consider and accept the possibilities, you will not be open to the solutions.

When you have found solutions to the What-if’s and know how to stay safe, you can relax and will be less afraid. By arming yourself with knowledge, you are empowering yourself. There ARE solutions, but you will need to take the initiative to learn about them, because YOU are the only one you can count on for protection!

According to the U.S. Department of Labor- Bureau of Labor Statistics, in just a 10 year period (between 1992 and 2002) there were 724 deaths of workers in residences due to crime. This only includes those that died. Like the nurse that was killed by the mentally unbalanced son of her patient in a town of only 4000 people. And the social worker killed by a client she had been working with for several months. The statistics do not count the thousands that were attacked and survived or were victims of crimes that went unreported. Like the 63-year-old real estate agent that was raped at knifepoint.

So, how can you be safer?

- Learn about the possibilities so you can develop safety plans. Knowing about ploys that are used, subtle body language to watch for, verbal danger signals and dangerous situations will help you develop your instincts.
- Trust your instincts! If you get a bad feeling about someone or something, do not dismiss those feelings! All animals have instincts, but humans are the only ones that choose to disregard them on a regular basis so as not to offend anyone or appear demented.
- Stay aware of your surroundings. If you don’t know who and what is around you, you are much less likely to spot the warning signals. The people that prey on humans prefer targets that are unaware and have not looked them in the eye.
- Use confident body language. Someone with confident body language and awareness is a less desirable choice for a predator, regardless of the person’s size or age. If your body language makes you appear strong and assured, it will send the bad guys on to those that appear weaker.
- Someone that cares about you should know where you are going and when you are expected to return. If you went missing, would anyone notice or know where to start looking for you? Unless signs of foul play are evident, most police departments require a 24 hour waiting period before an adult can be reported as missing.
- Don’t give out your personal information. Never use your home phone or home address on business cards, or during other business correspondence. If you have trouble with a client or you cross paths with a stalker, it should be as difficult as possible for them to find out where you live, if you have kids or pets, what your level of income might be, what your schedule is like, etc. If you work from home, get a P.O. Box to use as your address and use a cell phone as your business line.

This is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. I hope that I have raised your level of awareness enough that you will be willing to look at the possibilities and will develop safety plans to handle them. This is knowledge that could save your life! If you are interested in learning more about how to stay safe, I recommend the book: “Safe Home Visits”, available at www.Trafford.com I am available to speak at seminars, conferences and other group functions. This and other articles are available upon request. Visit www.SafeHomeVisits.com to contact me.

Stay Safe!

Mrs. Chris Puls Author of “Safe Home Visits” and a former Police Officer