

Personal Security



Court Security Division

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Personal Security

The potential danger associated with your position is understandably an unpleasant topic of family conversation. However, avoiding the subject does not lessen the potential for harm or make it go away. Discussing everyday practical habits with your family will no doubt enhance your safety against violent encounters.

Today, security challenges for those charged with the responsibility of ensuring judicial security have never been greater. Considering the volume and violent nature of cases brought into the Texas justice system, it is imperative that prudent safety and security measures along with a general awareness are practiced ensuring the safety for the judiciary, court participants, and the public.

Review, consider and adopt these recommended security practices as part of a holistic approach towards minimizing your and your family's vulnerability. The following suggestions are basic in their approach and you may already practice these measures as part of your daily routine. Be certain family members are aware of these practices as a family unit, to ensure that everyone is conscientious of their surroundings.

Some of these recommendations may appear obvious and apparent by applying common sense. Others may appear a bit extreme, but the purpose of these points is to provide you with a broad range of personal security considerations so that you can avoid unnecessary risk and deal with a dangerous circumstance should the need arise.

Criminal conduct and terroristic action against an individual generally occur outside the home after confirmation of the individual's established habits, practices, and routines. ***Your most predictable habit is the route of travel from home to office or commonly frequented locations.***

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HOME SECURITY

Home Safety

- Restrict possession of house keys. Change locks if keys are lost or stolen and when moving into a previously occupied residence.
- Lock all entrances at night, including the garage. Keep the house locked, even if you are at home.
- Invest in a quality shredder. Destroy all envelopes, correspondence, and other items that reflect your name and official position.
- Get to know your neighbors.
- Have a non-published number and unlisted residential address.
- Do not answer the telephone with your name or title, utilize caller ID and avoid ordering products or services by phone.
- Consider un-subscribing out of websites or use opt-out features.
- Be alert to public utility crews or any work person requesting access to your residence; check their identification through a peep-hole before allowing entry.
- Be alert to solicitors and strangers.
- Write down license numbers of suspicious vehicles; note descriptions of occupants, take picture if you can.
- Refuse unordered packages.
- Never eat consumables that are delivered to your residence from an unknown source. Contact local police.
- Be suspicious concerning any inquiries as to the whereabouts or activities of family members.
- Report suspicious activity to your local police.

Telephone Security

- Know the location of posted emergency numbers: Police, Fire/EMS, Hospital, Poison Control, etc.
- Do not answer your telephone with your official title.
- Report all threats to your local police.
- Enable your location on your cell phone, so in case of emergency, or if someone takes your phone, your phone can be tracked.

Mail

- Do not use your name, title, or any reference to your position on your mail.
- Have mail delivered to courthouse so it can be X-rayed and scanned.
- If possible, change home address to office address.
- Refuse unordered packages.
- Use a Post Office Box.
- Do not leave mail/newspapers in your mailbox overnight or while away for some time.

Suspicious Packages

- Never cut tape, strings, or wrappings on a suspected package. Never immerse a suspected letter or package in water. These actions could cause an explosive device to detonate.
- Never touch or move a suspicious package or letter.
- Report any suspicious packages or mail to your local police or the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF).

SIGNS OF A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE

- An unusual or unknown place of origin;
- No return address;
- An excessive amount of postage;
- Oily stain on package;
- Wires or strings protruding from or attached to an item;
- Incorrect spelling on a package label;
- Differing return address and postmark;
- Appearance of foreign-style handwriting;
- Peculiar odor; (Many explosives smell like shoe polish or almonds.)
- Unusual heaviness or lightness;
- Uneven balance or shape; or
- Springiness on the top, bottom, or sides.

Domestic Employees

- Conduct a thorough review of references.
- Inform employees about security responsibilities.
- Instruct them as to which phone or other means of communication to use in an emergency.

Security Precautions When Away

- Leave the house with a “lived-in” look.
- Stop deliveries or direct them to a neighbor’s home.
- Don’t leave notes on doors.
- Don’t hide keys outside the house.
- Use a timer to turn lights on and off at varying times and locations.
- Leave a radio on (with a timer.)
- Hide valuables.
- Notify police or a trusted neighbor of your absence.

RESIDENTIAL SECURITY

Exterior Grounds

- Do not place your name on the outside of your residence or mailbox.
- Install motion, spot or timer lights around perimeter of home.
- Exterior lighting should be fixed out of reach to prevent tampering.
- Create impression you are home by utilizing timers for interior lights.
- Control and trim vegetation and trees to eliminate hiding places.
- Plant cactus, or shrubs with thorns under first floor windows.
- Landscaping and light must work in unison with one another.
- Illuminate trees and shrubs from the ground up.
- Use outward facing light to illuminate yard.
- Secure outdoor sheds, outbuildings, and ladders. Tools can be used to break into home.

Other Exterior Features

- A clear view of approaches with clear sight lines allowing you to observe anything out of the ordinary.
- More than one access road.
- Off-street parking.
- Acquire a web-based camera system that alerts you to any motion via an associated app.

Entrances and Exits

- Equip glass doors and ground floor windows with interior release mechanisms that are not reachable from outside.
- Draw curtains, blinds, and shutters on all windows and doors during evening hours.
- Most break-ins occur through glass. Glass break sensors will enhance home security.
- Install three-inch strike plates with screws in all entry doors.

ENTRANCES AND EXITS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Solid doors with double cylinder deadbolt locks whenever there is glass in or near the door lock;
- Solid core doors with deadbolt lock; (Pin tumbler locks recommended)
- Pick-proof or bum-proof locks; (Cypher or combination locks **not** recommended);
- One-way peep-holes in doors;
- Bars and locks on skylights; and
- Three-inch strike plates with screws in all entry doors.

Vehicle/Garage

- Secure your vehicle in the garage. Enter/exit vehicle from inside the garage.
- If parked outside, make sure area is well lit.
- Door from garage to house should be a solid core door with dead bolt lock.
- Have a remote start installed on your vehicle unless so equipped.
- Install a garage door shield to prevent access to the garage door release mechanism.

Interior Features

- Acquire a home security system and intercom system, and **USE IT!**

- Keep your security system “On” while at home.
- Familiarize yourself with the emergency feature of the alarm system.
- Do not use sensitive personal information as passcodes.
- Display signage and/or decals indicating you have a security system.
- Ensure system has a battery backup in case of power failure.
- Install a system that includes heat sensors, smoke detectors, window and door sensors.
- Have security system inspected annually.
- Have fire extinguishers.
- Have medical and first-aid equipment.
- Minimally, acquire a wireless home security camera system that sends motion-activated alerts & HD video to your smartphone.

FAMILY

Safety for Children

- Instruct children to keep doors and windows locked, and never to admit strangers.
- Teach children how to contact the police or a neighbor in an emergency.
- If it is necessary to leave children at home, keep the house well lighted and notify the neighbors.
- Know where your children are all the time – morning, noon, and night.

ADVICE FOR CHILDREN

- Keep doors and windows locked and never allow strangers into the home;
- Never leave home without advising parents where you will be and who will accompany you;
- Travel in pairs or groups;
- Walk along busy streets and avoid isolated areas;
- Use play areas where recreational activities are supervised by responsible adults and where police protection is readily available;
- Refuse automobile rides from strangers and refuse to accompany strangers anywhere even if the stranger tells you that mom or dad sent him or said it was okay; and
- Report immediately to the nearest person of authority (teacher, police) anyone who attempts to molest or annoy you.

INTERNET SECURITY

Social Media

- Have a strong password and store password in secure place.
- Limit the type/amount of information you post. Do not check in to places on social media.
- Restrict who can view certain information on your profile.
- Review the service's privacy policy. You may realize that many of these 'free' services aren't all that free. Ex: You're giving them information in return for use of the service.

Safety for Children

- Never give out identifying information – home address, school name or telephone number in a public message such as chat or bulletin boards and be sure you're dealing with someone who both you and your child know and trust before giving it out via e-mail. Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, marital status, financial information. Consider using a pseudonym or un-listing your child's name if your services allow it.
- Get to know the services your child uses. If you don't know how to log on, get your child to show you. Find out what types of information it offers and whether there are ways for parents to block out objectionable material.
- Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission. If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public spot, and be sure to accompany your child.

- Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your children receive a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your service provider and ask for their assistance.
- Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online, immediately report this to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) by calling **1-800-843-5678**. You should also notify your online service.
- Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him or herself. Thus, someone indicating that "she" is a "12-year-old-girl" could be a 40-year-old man.
- Remember that everything you read online may not be true. Any offer that's "too good to be true" probably is. Be very careful about any offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.
- Be sure to make this a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all their other friends.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Vehicles

- Do not use "vanity" plates that identify you by name or official position.
- Do not have your name or official title displayed at your office parking space.

Auto Maintenance

- Keep your vehicle in good repair. You don't want it to fail when you need it the most.
- Keep your gas tank at least ½ full always.
- Park in well-lighted areas.
- Always lock your car, even when it's outside your home.
- Don't leave it on the street overnight, if possible.
- Never get out without checking for suspicious persons. If in doubt, drive away.
- Leave only the ignition key with parking attendants.
- Don't allow entry to the trunk unless you're there to watch.
- Never leave garage doors open or unlocked.
- Use a remote starter for your car if available.

- Use a remote garage door opener if available.

When Going Out

- Avoid high risk areas and vary movements so as not to be predictable.
- Try to be inconspicuous when using public transportation and facilities. Dress, conduct, and mannerisms should not attract attention.
- Avoid public demonstrations; **do not be curious**.

On the Road

- Before leaving buildings to get into your vehicle, check the surrounding area to determine if anything of a suspicious nature exists. Display the same vigilance before exiting your vehicle.
- Before entering vehicles, check for suspicious objects on the seats and floor.
- Vary times, routes, and modes of travel.
- Avoid isolated roads and dark alleys.
- Know location of safe-havens along routes of routine travel.
- Habitually ride with seatbelts buckled, doors locked, and windows closed.
- Do not allow your vehicle to be boxed in; maintain a minimum 8-foot interval between you and the vehicle in front and avoid the inner lanes.
- Be alert while driving or riding.
- Know how to react if surveillance is suspected or confirmed.
- Circle the block for a confirmation of surveillance.
- Do not stop or take other actions which could lead to confrontation.
- Do not drive home if you think you are being followed.
- Get a description of car and its occupants.
- Go to the nearest safe-haven.
- Report incident to your local police.

Actions if Attacked

- Without subjecting yourself, passengers, or pedestrians to harm, try to draw attention to your car by sounding the horn.
- Put another vehicle between you and your pursuer.

- Execute immediate turn and escape, jump curb if necessary at a 30-45-degree angle, 35 mph maximum.
- Ram blocking vehicle if necessary.

EVENTS THAT CAN SIGNAL THE START OF AN ATTACK

- Cyclist falling in front of your car.
- Flagman or workman stopping your car.
- Fake police checkpoint.
- Disabled vehicle/accident victims on the road.
- Unusual detours.
- An accident in which your car is struck.
- Cars or pedestrian traffic that box you in.
- Sudden activity or gunfire.

Commercial Buses, Trains & Taxis

- Vary mode of commercial transportation.
- Select busy stops.
- Use different taxi service.
- Don't let someone unknown to you direct you to a specific cab.
- Affirm the driver and the picture on the license are the same.
- Try to travel with a companion.
- If possible, specify the route you want the taxi to follow.

TRAVELING DEFENSIVELY BY AIR

Travel Arrangements

- Don't use title or office address on tickets, travel documents, or hotel reservations.
- Select window seat for more protection. Aisle seats would be closer to a hijacker's movements up and down the aisle.
- Rear seats offer more protection since they are farther from the center of hostile action, which is often near the cockpit.
- Seats at an emergency exit may provide an opportunity to escape.

Personal Identification

- If you are using a tourist passport, consider placing your official identification and related documents in your checked luggage, not in your wallet or briefcase.
- If you must carry these documents on your person, select a hiding place onboard the aircraft where you could “ditch” them in case of a hijacking.
- Ensure luggage tags don’t show your official title.

Precautions at Airports

- Look for the nervous passengers who maintain eye contact with others from a distance. Note behavior not consistent with that of others in the area.
- No matter where you are in the terminal, identify objects suitable for cover in the event of attack. Pillars, trash cans, luggage, large planters, counters, and furniture can provide protection.
- Avoid secluded areas that provide concealment for attackers.
- Be aware of unattended baggage anywhere in the terminal.
- Report suspicious activity to airport security personnel.

Actions if Attacked

- Dive for cover. Do not run.
- If you must move, belly crawl or roll. Stay low to the ground, using available cover.
- Place arms and elbows next to your rib cage to protect your lungs, heart, and chest. Cover your ears and head with your hands to protect neck arteries, ears and skull.
- Responding security personnel will not be able to recognize you from attackers. Do not attempt to assist them in any way. Lie still until told to get up.

Actions if Hijacked

- Remain calm and cooperate with your captors.
- Be aware that all hijackers may not reveal themselves at the same time. A lone hijacker may be used to draw out security personnel for neutralization by other hijackers.
- Surrender your tourist passport in response to a general demand for identification.
- Discretely dispose of any US affiliated documents.
- Don’t offer any information; confirm your official position if directly confronted with the fact. Be prepared to explain that you always travel on your personal passport and that no deceit was intended.

- Don't draw attention to yourself through sudden body movements, verbal remarks, or hostile looks.
- Prepare yourself for possible verbal and physical abuse, lack of food, drink and sanitary conditions.
- If permitted, read, sleep, or write to occupy your time.
- Discretely observe your captors and get a thorough physical description. Include voice patterns and language distinctions, as well as clothing and unique physical characteristics, scars, marks or tattoos.
- Cooperate with any rescue attempt. Lie on the floor until told to rise.