

PREVENT A CRIME BY HAVING A SAFETY PLAN IN PLACE

By Susan Bartelstone, Crime Prevention and Personal Safety Specialist

A number of years ago, I read an article written by an FBI instructor which stated that if a person could respond quickly, *within 20–30 seconds from the moment they first perceived danger*, that encounter could probably be resolved favorably.

Oh boy, did this make sense to me! Over the years up to that point, I'd had six dangerous criminal encounters—and I'm talking being surrounded by a group of guys in an isolated location (twice), having a knife pulled out on me when I intervened between a frightened teenager and some guy trying to pick her up, and confrontations of that nature. In five of those six encounters, I prevented the crime from happening, or defused the situation, and got away without any violence. Only once did I have to fight, and that was because I got jumped by a guy crouched down between two parked cars and was taken by surprise (yes, I prevented the rape).

When I analyzed what I'd done in those five incidents to stop a dangerous situation from escalating, the common factor was simply this:

I was thinking rather than panicking and looking for a way out of the situation instead of acting haphazardly.

➡ **The skill of prevention.** My years of self defense and martial arts training had only taught me how to fight, not how to prevent an attack or figure out escape plans; so to fully understand the intuitive processes I'd used, I studied the work of a variety of experts from many different disciplines and also became certified as a crime prevention specialist. The result: I developed a three-part system called ***Think Fast—Talk Fast—Fight Smart*** which I've been teaching and using personally for over 18 years. This system is a total approach to personal safety—starting from the moment that danger is first perceived right up to the moment before the first punch is thrown—focusing on prevention, verbal de-escalation tactics and “dirty” tricks.

“Prevention” (the *Think Fast* part of the system) is really a skill and a series of strategies. I named the process I designed to teach this skill the ***20-Second Response*** because it's a method for getting early warning of danger, analyzing options quickly under pressure and coming up with a viable plan of action within the critical 20–30 seconds that the FBI instructor stressed.

➡ **The 20-Second Response.** The five components of the ***20-Second Response*** are:

1. Stay alert
2. Listen to your instincts
3. Remain calm in the face of danger
4. ***Come up with a plan of action quickly***
5. Implement the plan quickly by rehearsing it until it becomes automatic

With practice, they build on each other and work harmoniously together.

► **Making a Safety Plan.** Perhaps the most important component is #4—coming up with a plan of action quickly. But, how can you be sure you’ll be able to think of response options if you’re terrified? And, in 20 seconds, no less?

The best way to be mentally prepared for a criminal encounter is by having a Safety Plan in place beforehand. Start your own process off by doing the Safety Plan Exercise below:

1. Identify at least five potential safety problems or dangerous situations in your personal life or daily routine that cause you concern.
2. Do some research: collect safety tip pamphlets; read personal safety and self defense books; watch videos. Also study books on defusing confrontations and maybe take a self defense course or three.*
3. Then formulate a plan of action for each of the problems you’ve identified that details everything you could do and say in that instance. The more options you’re familiar with, the quicker you’ll be able to come up with a safe response should something happen.
4. Write down your Safety Plans on your computer or in a notebook and rehearse them periodically so they become internalized (component #5 of the **20-Second Response**). That way your response to any anticipated danger will be automatic and speedy.

Here’s a great example of a successful Safety Plan: a woman in one of my Workshops in New York City was worried about coming home late on the subway after her college classes. First she determined where the video surveillance waiting area was (usually a safer place to wait for the train) but she decided that it was too far away from the exit stairs in case of trouble. She found she could stand at the top of stairs closest to the token booth (her source of assistance in case of trouble) and still see the train coming in enough time to make it down to the platform. She learned how to find the car with the engineer (the best subway car to ride in) and she bought a canister of pepper foam spray to carry with her.*

About one year after she took my Workshop, she e-mailed me that someone actually did confront her on the platform one night (as she had feared) but that she knew exactly where to run to for help and how to respond...which she did loudly. From her description of the incident, I was pretty sure she’d responded easily within 20 seconds.

* *One resource you might want to check out is my upcoming book **Think Fast and Prevent a Violent Crime: How to Respond to Danger in 20 Seconds (or Less)!** which contains over 60 examples of real-life Safety Plans and success stories, (including three of my own narrow escapes from danger) and more than 100 safety tips. The book also teaches the principles of the 20-Second Response in depth and lists ways to practice it in a multitude of non-crime scenarios. Check www.fightsafe.com for publication information.*

* *Pepper foam is better for indoor use because it won’t fog up the whole room...with you in it.*

Ask Dear Safety Solutions. I've been dubbed the "Ann Landers of Self Defense" because I've helped hundreds of people with their safety concerns over the years. If you go to my website www.fightsafe.com, you'll see a section called *Dear Safety Solutions* where I've posted some of the e-mails from people who've asked for assistance. If *you'd* like assistance coming up with response-options for your Safety Plans or a review of what you've put together, just give me an e-holla at solutions@fightsafe.com.

No absolutes exist in crime scenarios and no advice can address every variable. Always evaluate each situation individually and respond in the way you instinctively judge best.

*Years ago, Susan Bartelstone had a bad break-up with a guy—complete with physical and emotional bruises—and determined to learn how to protect herself. Today she's a Personal Safety and certified Crime Prevention specialist, and a 17 year teaching veteran, with 18 years combined training in WWII Combatives, self defense and martial arts. She's been featured in a long and varied list of media and has appeared on such shows as "The Today Show" and "America's Most Wanted." Referred to as the "Ann Landers of Self Defense," her articles on crime prevention have appeared in over two dozen publications and she's helped hundreds of people solve their personal safety problems. Visit her at www.fightsafe.com for information about her upcoming book **Think Fast and Prevent a Violent Crime: How to Respond to Danger in 20 Seconds (or Less)!** or e-mail her with you personal safety questions at solutions@fightsafe.com.*