

# Kidnap Avoidance & Survival

Kidnappers usually **spend time and effort conducting surveillance** before an attempted abduction. If the target takes **basic precautions and demonstrates sufficient awareness**, kidnappers will often **move on to an easier target**.



## Taking Basic Precautions

There are a number of basic precautions you can take to reduce the risk of being targeted:

- » **Avoid attracting attention.** Lower your profile by leaving expensive jewellery or watches at home and dressing simply. If possible, avoid using ATMs or exchanging money in the street. Stay out of public places (e.g. hotel lobby or bar) and avoid 'loose talk' which can be heard by anyone in earshot.
- » **Avoid routine.** A fixed schedule makes it easier for you to be followed and eventually abducted. Vary aspects of your daily routine such as your route to work and your means of transportation. Limit the disclosure of your (travel) itinerary.
- » **Remain alert.** Some routine is inevitable. Recognize routine travel or work patterns and increase your level of awareness during these periods.
- » **Plan ahead.** Assess the security of your meeting locations. Programme emergency numbers into your mobile phone and avoid being rushed – which can often lead to careless actions.
- » **Communicate.** Let your partner or colleague know your schedule, who you are meeting and where, as well as when you expect to return.
- » **Be Proactive.** Always think about your personal security. Lock your car doors and confirm the identity of the person or driver meeting you.

## Identifying Threats

You can reduce your vulnerability further by being aware of your environment. Kidnappers can be meticulous in their planning but usually lack advanced surveillance skills, making them easy to spot. Below is a list of common indicators that surveillance is being conducted.

### When on foot, look out for the following:

- » People talking to themselves;
- » People peering around corners, through doors or windows;
- » Sudden changes of direction;
- » Mirroring: you cross the road, they cross the road;
- » Fixation: staring at you and not noticing what is going on around them;
- » People turning away or leaving the area when observed;
- » Anyone seen reading, loitering, or standing without a reason to be there;
- » Anyone suspicious using a mobile phone when entering or exiting your house, workplace or meeting location.

### When travelling in a vehicle, look out for the following:

- » Vehicles or individuals in prohibited zones;
- » Broken down vehicles near your commonly used routes or areas, including choke points (e.g. narrow, remote road with no escape routes) ;
- » Vehicles that remain in the same area for extended periods of time;
- » Vehicles that remain at the same distance regardless of speed or traffic;
- » Vehicles that drive erratically, make sudden stops, slow down or speed up, or consistently drive by the same location.

## Anti-Surveillance Tactics

If you have observed any of the indicators listed above, there are several techniques you can use to try and confirm your suspicions, particularly if on foot:

- » **Frequently look directly behind you.** This can be overt or covert and may spook any potential surveillance team. Crossing the road, particularly at a pedestrian crossing, offers an opportunity to look back and forth several times without it being obvious what you are doing.
- » **Enter a safe indoor environment and use the opportunity to observe your surroundings.** When you leave, check behind for anyone following you. In urban areas enter a shop, large store or mall. Hold the door open for those behind you giving a chance to look back or use the door's reflection.
- » **Challenge anyone suspected of following you.** Ask them for directions or the time, and note their reaction. Only do this if you feel comfortable in your surroundings.
- » **Scan the area for Bluetooth devices with your mobile phone.** Scan in several locations and see if you see the same device multiple times.
- » **If at any time you believe you are being followed, head to a safe location** (e.g. police station or hospital) **and call for a vehicle to collect you.**



# Surviving a Kidnapping

Traditional kidnappings typically involve three stages: **abduction, movement to a safe house** and **captivity**.

## Abduction

The point of abduction is a dangerous time for a victim, with many experiencing confusion, disbelief, realization and fear. During the abduction phase, victims normally suffer threats and pressure, including verbal abuse or actual physical violence. When abducted, you may have to make an instant decision about whether to resist or attempt to escape. Remember that:

- » Escape may be totally unrealistic and a high risk strategy;
- » The kidnappers will have the advantage, since the abduction will have taken place at a time and place of their choosing;
- » It is easy to provoke a violent reaction resulting in injury or death.

## Movement to a safe house

When being moved to a safe house (by vehicle, motorbike, boat or on foot):

- » Try to control your fear and emotions;
- » Follow any instructions you are given;
- » Mentally record what you see and hear during movement.

You may be moved around from one destination to another or passed from one group to another, but eventually you will sense that you have reached your probable final destination. You are likely to be taken to a prison-like room in an urban or rural environment where your abductors plan to keep you.

## Captivity

Whilst in captivity, try to follow some simple rules:

### Don't

- » Be a nuisance or stand out from the crowd if in a group;
- » Stare, which could be seen as challenging or threatening to the kidnappers;
- » Be overly submissive, which reinforces power and encourages aggression;
- » Self-negotiate.

### Do

- » Comply with instructions through passive acceptance;
- » Address captors by their names if openly known;
- » Alert captors to your medical needs;
- » Stay calm - your controlled behavior will influence those around you.

During a kidnapping, you should prepare yourself for long periods of boredom and isolation punctuated by extreme moments of threats, pressure and violence. There are several strategies you can employ to help you cope:

- » If there are other hostages, try to communicate with them. Communication can help you overcome feelings of isolation;
- » Try to get hold of some essentials. Simple things like a blanket, papers or magazines will make a vast difference to your comfort;
- » Manage your time by setting up schedules for simple physical or mental tasks, such as exercise, day dreaming and mind games;
- » Try and build a rapport with your kidnappers. Start conversations about family, sports or any other non-controversial topics. Get them to see you as a human being and not just a kidnap victim;
- » Aim to maintain your dignity and self-respect at all times.

As a hostage you will feel isolated, with limited or no access to outside information. You may have feelings of hopelessness and abandonment, but remember that family, friends and colleagues will be working hard to secure your safe release. Your job is to survive the kidnapping ordeal.

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