

# Staying Safe

## *A Guide to Personal Security in Metro Atlanta*

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America is known as “the land of opportunity”. People come here to escape the trials of living elsewhere or to work for a better life. Everyone wants to view this nation as a welcoming, safe place where dreams grow into realities. Sadly, things do not always work out so smoothly. America can also be a place of violence. People do not like to talk about this tragic aspect of society because it is not a pleasant topic. Yet dealing with violence is a necessary topic. Newcomers are especially vulnerable, but with some common sense and a few basic guidelines to help keep you on your guard, you need only to feel watchful---not afraid.

### The Basics

Some basic tips to keep in mind when you go out will greatly increase your personal safety. Try not to travel at night alone.

- **There is safety in numbers**—you and a friend together are much safer than you or your friend by yourself. If you are walking or riding the bus alone at night, be very aware of the people around you. When waiting for the bus, stand instead of sitting. If you think that someone may be following you, get to a public, well-lit place immediately.
- **Always be watchful of your surroundings.** Try to stay out of lonely or dark buildings, walkways, or parking garages. Walk assertively and with purpose. Potential attackers are less likely to target someone who walks quickly and confidently than someone who wanders or looks confused. Pretend that you are in control, and you will exert confidence---a deterrent to attackers.
- **Do not talk to strangers** while waiting for public transportation if they make you feel uncomfortable. You have no obligation to them, and engaging them in conversation only makes you more vulnerable.
- If you are using a car, **park as near as you can to the building.** Try to avoid parking next to large vans or behind a line of bushes. Lock your car once you get out. When you return, it is a good idea to glance into the backseat of your car before getting into it. This way you can make sure that no one has entered your car and is waiting for you to return. Lock your car doors as soon as you are in your car. If possible, keep your gas tank filled to avoid ever having to purchase gas late at night, as gas stations are common targets for attackers.

### Safety at Home

Do not open your door to strangers. You can talk to them through the door. Leave your doors and windows locked at all times. Many burglars will go door-to-door looking for an easy entry into a home. Locking your doors and windows may be the very thing that prevents a burglary.

Also, beware of fake police officers. Just because they are wearing a uniform does not mean they are actual police. People often are over willing to let police officers into their homes because they assume that the police must be legitimate. But this is a common avenue for crime because criminals know that the public is especially vulnerable in this situation. Always ask to see a badge or if you are still concerned, call the local police to check if a unit has been dispatched to your area.

If you see anyone behaving suspiciously outside of your home, do not give in to your curiosity to see what is happening. Call the police if you are worried about anything. They are here to serve you and keep you safe no matter what. You can reach the local Clarkston police can be at (404) 292-9465. This is the non-emergency number. If you feel you are in immediate danger, dial 9-1-1.

### Other Helpful Hints

Using these defensive tips will increase your personal safety, but you can also offensively protect yourself as well. Carrying your keys in your hand and in sight will act as a deterrent to a potential attacker. If you ever are attacked, use your keys in self-defense as a knife to slash and stab your attacker.

Pepper spray is another way to protect yourself. Sprayed in the face of an attacker, the pepper spray will cause an immediate allergic reaction in the attacker's eyes to the pepper.

If you have a cell phone, carry it with you at all times for safety purposes. If you do not have a cell phone, keep enough change for a pay phone on you. This will let you call anyone at anytime that you need them.

### Should the Unthinkable Happen. . .

If you are robbed, do not try to fight your attacker for your purse or backpack. While the items in it may be valuable, they are replaceable. Your life, however, is not. Protect your life first and foremost.

If you are attacked, make as much noise as possible. Scream for help so that anyone within earshot will hear you and know that you are in trouble. Screaming "RAPE" regardless of the situation will often elicit a more serious response from bystanders and is often more effective. Do not be embarrassed or feel awkward about yelling. You want to attract as much attention as possible in this situation.

**\*\*Contact your local police immediately to inform them exactly what happened.**

### Sexual Assault

Georgia state law defines sexual assault as physical contact with the intimate parts of the body of another person without the consent of that person. Rape is defined as any penetration of the female sex organ by the male sex organ forcibly and against her will. Both of these actions are illegal.

If you are sexually assaulted, do not remain silent about it. Do not be embarrassed or feel that it is even slightly acceptable. You are in no way at fault for an assault against yourself. If you so choose, you have the right to take legal action. At any rate, you have the right to protection and medical treatment. The Dekalb Rape Crisis Center offers free crisis counseling and emotional support groups as well as individual care. The number for the Crisis Hotline is (404) 377-1428. Their website is located at <http://www.dekalbrapecrisiscenter.org/contact>.

### In Conclusion

Despite all this, you should not live in fear. Yes, the world can be a dangerous place, but a little common sense will help keep you safe. The main thing is to be alert and aware of your surroundings. Also, be confident! Atlanta, as an urban setting, experiences a lot of crime, but city officials and the police force are working daily to make it safer for citizens like you and me. The U.S., like any other nation, has its downsides, but it is a wonderful place to live after all.