

## **1 Holiday Shopping Safety:**

The day after Thanksgiving is referred to as “Black Friday”, and it is one of the largest retail shopping days in the US. It is estimated that 26% of Americans will be out shopping on this day. Shoppers will line up hours before the stores open hoping to be the first to grab the “can’t live without items” at low, low prices. Traffic jams will occur all around the major malls. Parking spaces will be impossible to find, and tempers can flare up and fights erupt over who grabbed the last sale item first. But keep in mind that this is also the unofficial launch of robbery season! Predators and criminals are out shopping too.

### **Here are some Holiday Shopping Safety tips for you to consider:**

The first tip is to PLAN ahead.

**BEFORE YOU WALK OUT OF YOUR FRONT DOOR:**

- Plan your itinerary:
- Where are you going?
- What stores do you want to hit?
- What time does that store have the special sale that you can’t miss.

Make sure you have at least half a tank of gas. Traffic can be horrendous and nothing can put more of a damper on that holiday shopping mood than you running out of gas with cars honking at you.

If you have a cell phone, make sure it is charged and take it with you. We encourage you to enter your “ICE” numbers in your cell phone. ICE stands for “In Case of Emergency”. If something were to happen to you and you become unconscious and can’t speak, emergency personnel can quickly find the person they need to notify on your cell phone. This gives you the opportunity to select who you want to have notified in the event of an emergency.

It is also a good idea to share your shopping plans with a family member or trusted friend. **EVEN BETTER:** Have a friend go with you. The buddy system isn’t just for the pool, and it doesn’t just apply to kids. There is safety in numbers.

When deciding where to shop, consider your safety first.

- Does the shopping center provide a lot of visible security?
- Do they provide a security escort when requested?
- Do they have valet service?
- Is there well lit parking available?

### **Now I know a lot of people have more credit cards than they know about. Some cards are never even used that are kept in their purse or wallet. What are some things we should do with our purses or wallets before we walk out the front door?**

Before you head out the door to go shopping, please carefully pack your purse or wallet. Take out the credit cards you do not need and leave them at home in a safe place. Carry only the credit cards and ID that you need. Sign your credit cards immediately with a Sharpie pen so it will not wear off. You may want to write “CHECK ID” on the back of that credit card with a

Sharpie pen in addition to signing it. This can be a hassle having to show ID every time you use your card, but it does protect you in the event you were to lose your card.

NEVER carry your social security card around with you. Know your number so you don't need your card! There is no reason for a merchant to ask for your social security number anyway while you are out shopping.

We encourage you to keep a master list of all credit cards and account numbers and contact information for the credit card company in a SAFE place in case your cards are lost or stolen. A good idea is to photocopy the front and back of each of your cards and keep this in a secure location. The back of the card will have the toll free numbers for you to call in the event your card is lost or stolen.

### **So I've pulled into the mall parking lot. What should I be thinking about now as I am driving around looking for a parking spot?**

The best possible scenario is to valet when possible. Consider this an insurance policy - especially for women or parents with children. It may only cost \$5 to \$10, but it is worth it. If valet is not an option, then try to park as close to an entrance as possible.

ALWAYS park where there is plenty of light - not just around your car, but illuminating your walk to and from the store. Never park next to a van or a vehicle where people are just sitting inside. People go to the mall or stores to shop - not to sit around in their vehicles. Maybe they are waiting for an opportunity to do something bad. Don't give them a chance!

Once you have parked, familiarize yourself with the location so you can easily remember where you parked your car and so you will be able to find it when you return from the store. ALWAYS lock your vehicle - even if it is an old clunker and there is nothing of value in it. You don't want to be surprised by the thug hiding inside your car as you drive off.

When walking to and from your car into the store, walk with a purpose and authority. If carrying a purse, carry it close to your body, not dangling by the straps. Constantly scan your surroundings. NO cell phone use. NO headphones. Don't surrender one of your senses or defense mechanisms. The lesson here is "Don't look and act like a victim." The laws of the jungle apply. The attacker looks for the distracted, the weak, the target that is unaware they are being stalked.

### **What are some ways we can avoid making ourselves a target?**

Shop during daylight hours when possible. But do not have a false sense of security just because the sun is out. Crimes do occur during the day as well. Also, it is easy to get to distracted when you are out shopping. You are running through the list of people and gifts you must purchase. Don't get so caught up in your shopping that you fail to keep track of your surroundings, who is around you, or your personal property. We recommend you shop with a friend. There is strength and SAFETY in numbers.

Don't attract a lot of attention to yourself. Carry minimal amounts of cash. Don't wear a lot of jewelry - certainly not FLASHY jewelry. Wear conservative, comfortable clothing. And as you shop, be alert in crowded places. Pickpockets love to hit their targets in jammed aisles and packed elevators.

Don't overload yourself with packages! Just think how easy a target you are at that point. You have to put the packages down to get your keys out and someone runs by, grabs a bundle, and takes off.

Beware of strangers that approach you for any reason. Sometimes the goal is to distract you so one of their partners in crime can steal something from you.

And here is one important not:

DO NOT HESITATE to ask for a security escort.

What are some things I should think about to protect myself while I am inside the mall or store?

If you pay with a credit or debit card, make sure you get it back from the sales attendant. Never leave your purse on the counter or in a shopping cart unattended. Keep your wallet or cash in your front pocket. If you need to use an ATM, use one inside a busy, well-lit location. Withdraw only the amount of cash you need. **PROTECT** your PIN number - your security number for your ATM card by shielding it from other's view with your body whenever you enter into the key pad.

If you plan on making a lot of purchases, return to your vehicle periodically with your new purchases so you are not overloaded with packages. Do this quickly - do not be distracted, and be aware of your surroundings while loading. If you don't necessarily have a prime parking spot, consider getting in your car and moving it to a new location to give any potential thieves the thought that you have left and are not a target.

If you have several smaller packages, consider trying to consolidate them into one larger bag. Store your packages in the trunk of your car. If your vehicle does not have a trunk, store them out of plain sight - on the floorboard, under a blanket or clothes.

Remember - you always have the option of having some items delivered to your home rather than you having to take them home. Some companies offer free shipping or delivery during the holiday season.

Don't leave GPS units, IPODS, cell phones, backpacks, laptops, etc., out in your car where they are visible.

If you spot suspicious activity around your vehicle, return to the mall or store and alert security immediately.

## **What are some safety tips for the parents that will be taking their children shopping with them?**

If at all possible, leave them at home with a baby sitter. The malls and stores will be crowded and it will make it extremely difficult for you to keep track of them, your personal belongings, and be concerned about everyone's safety. Take turns babysitting for family members or friends.

If you have no other option but to take the kids with you, here are some tips:

- Please keep a close eye on your children.
- It is best to keep children 4 and under strapped in a stroller.
- Children in shopping carts should also be belted and seated.
- ALWAYS accompany your children to the restroom.
- ALWAYS bring your young children into the restroom with you. Avoid the restrooms that are tucked away. Look for well lit restrooms in high traffic areas. If you are comfortable letting an older child use the restroom alone, always stand outside the door and holler in "I'm right outside the door if you need me!" After a couple of moments, open the door and ask "Is everything ok?" If there is no response, enter immediately!

## **ALWAYS teach your children the "Rule of Separation":**

If they become separated from you, please teach them to find a mommy with children or grandmother with children and stay with her in the store.

- (1) If your child is lost, he/she needs to remain calm. He/She needs to stay in an open area where he can be seen. Their natural response is to wander off to see if they can find you, but this can only lead to them getting further away from you, especially if they are unfamiliar with the surroundings.
- (2) The child should approach a Mommy with children or a grandmother with children and tell her that they are lost and can't find their mommy. They should know their name and the full names of their parents. This will help in the event the store has a paging system as they can alert you that they have found your child.

We are not fans of telling a child to look for a police officer. It is rare that you see one in a store to start with - maybe an occasional security guard. But we don't think security guards are the safest option. This is the profession that brought us the Son of Sam killer, John Lennon's assassin, and the Hillside Strangler.

- (3) Make sure your child knows they are NEVER to leave the area with the adult to go look for you.

- (4) You can even be proactive and suggest a meeting place in a central location - assuming the child is older - where you can meet in the event you are separated.
- (5) Assure your child that you will **NOT** stop looking for them if they are lost. This knowledge will help your child remain calm.
- (6) Review these steps often with your children. Repetition and reinforcement is key!

They should not leave the store, nor go into the parking lot to look for you. Please do not allow your child to wear any item of clothing or carry any thing with them that has their name on it! This makes them such an easy target for predators: “Hey Johnny. I’m a good friend of your parents. Can you help me?” Do not leave them alone in public places such as video arcades, movie theaters, or the playground because it is a convenient babysitter.

Don’t leave them alone in a toy store or toy section of a store. If you allow your older children to go to the mall without you, they need to TAKE A FRIEND - someone you know and trust. Have them check in with you on a regular basis while they are out. Make sure you have a clear plan in place to pick them up including where, when, and what to do in case there is a change of plans.

If your child were to ever be grabbed by someone, please teach your child to scream:

“Help! This is not my daddy! or This is not my mommy!”

Practice having them do this so they will be comfortable doing it should the need ever arise. A child calling attention to himself in public is a predator’s worst nightmare.

### **Remember the “CHECK - IN “ Rule:**

Your child must check in with you before going anywhere in a public place.

Dress your children in brightly colored clothes to help keep them easily visible to you. Remember what they are wearing. You can use your cell phone to take a quick picture of them from head to toe in their clothes before you go out the door of your home. Make sure your child knows your home address and phone number. Some parents even sew their name, address, and cell phone number into the inside of their child’s shirt just in case they are lost or separated. Of course, this is for younger children that do not yet know this information. The sooner your child can be taught this information the better.

### **I have fought the good fight, made my purchases, and now I am ready to leave the store or mall. What should I be thinking about when I leave?**

If you took the safest route, you valeted your vehicle. Give the attendant your parking receipt, have your tip ready and in hand, and get in your car and drive off. If you didn’t valet, make sure you leave in a group. If alone, call for a security escort. Call a family member or

friend and let them know you are leaving. Get your keys out of your purse or pocket and have them ready to go before you walk out the door. Do not talk on your cell phone. Do not text. Do not wear headphones. Do not fumble through your purse for anything.

While walking in the parking lot, walk along the main travel aisles. Do not cut through or wind your way around rows of parked cars. As you walk, constantly scan your surroundings. Watch for people sitting in or standing by parked cars or vans. If someone pulls up in a vehicle to ask you directions, don't approach their vehicle. Trust your gut. If they don't look safe, keep walking and ignore them. If they look safe, still answer from a distance and don't get distracted and let your guard down. ALWAYS avoid people asking for money or trying to sell something in the parking lot. If you are approached, firmly tell them no and quickly walk away. Make a scene if necessary.

When you get to your car, continue to scan while loading children and packages. Teach your children to enter and exit your vehicle quickly. BE VERY CAUTIOUS in trying to remove fliers or papers that may have been stuck under your windshield. If you don't need your wipers and the paper does not obstruct your vision in any way, then maybe it is safer to drive off and remove the paper at home. This is a technique some thieves have used to stall you in the parking lot. If you must remove it, constantly scan that parking lot with your keys in your hand, not in the ignition.

Get in your car. We would love for you to remember and implement this phrase:

“Look, lock & leave.”

Look in the back seat & floorboards. Lock your car. And go. This is not the place to balance your checkbook or start texting. If being followed once you are in your car, call 911 immediately or drive to the nearest police station.

**Some people are going to be getting up very early to get in line to shop and buy these bargains. What should I do if I happen to leave my lights on and my battery goes dead?**

Do not get out of the vehicle. If you have AAA or a roadside assistance service with your car dealership, call them. You should also pull out one of your receipts and get the store's phone number. Call the store on your cell phone and let them know your car will not start. Tell them your location and ask that they notify mall security immediately. Then ask the store for the mall security phone number so you can call them if you have any problems before they get to you. As soon as you hang up the phone, call mall security yourself. Wait for them to come to you. If they are not able to help you, get back in your car and call a tow truck or AAA if you are a member. Ask the mall security officer if he/she can stay with you until the tow truck arrives.

**What if I am approached by an armed robber and they demand my purse or packages?**

Remain calm and assess your situation. But please remember - these are items that can be replaced. Under no circumstances should you resist. Under no circumstances should you fight. Hand the stuff over. Don't jeopardize your personal safety - don't risk your life for these

material possessions. Your family will not sit around at the funeral and say “Wow. He was so brave to fight with that robber before he shot him.” They will be saying “If only he had just given him his wallet he would still be here.”

### **What if someone tries to abduct me?**

**Different story! RESIST, RESIST, RESIST!**

**The LAWS of the JUNGLE apply the moment you walk out the door of your home:**

Too many people cooperate in their own victimization. Not in the jungle. You don't see a gazelle go willingly with a lion or tiger. They run. They fight. They do all they can to get away. Gavin De Becker, a widely respected security expert, notes that the human being is the ONLY prey in nature that cooperates in its own victimization. People think if they cooperate, they will not get hurt. This is reinforced on TV. When the bad guy says “Keep your mouth shut and come with me”, the actors do just that.

In real life, if a predator says “Don't yell”, that is your key to do just the opposite. You YELL like your life depends on it, because it does. The predator is telling you that it does not work to his advantage for you to yell. He is letting you know of a way that you can mess up his plans.

Yell!

Throw your keys away if he is trying to force you in the vehicle. Lie down on the pavement kicking and screaming. Use your fingernails to claw his eyes out. Seriously! I'd rather taxpayer dollars be spent trying to teach this criminal how to read braille because you blinded him, instead of you playing the starring role of the victim in the next episode of “America's Most Wanted.”

If the predator orders you to go with him, he is really telling you that staying put in that same location is not to his advantage, but to yours. This is your clue to stay put. The last thing you want to have happen is to be taken from crime scene #1 to crime scene #2 where he will be able to do anything and everything he wants to with you. This is a tough lesson. But if he is going to try and shoot you while you fight to break free and run away, it is better for this to happen in a location where you can be found and medical help can be quickly summoned. Your chances of survival are greatly increased!

### **What should I do if my purse, wallet, or credit cards are stolen?**

- (1) File a police report immediately.
- (2) Cancel the credit cards. You should have the master list of these cards with the phone numbers to contact the credit card company, or you should have the color copies of these cards.

- (3) Place a FRAUD ALERT on your credit cards by calling the 3 major, national credit card companies:
  - \* Equifax
  - \* Experian
  - \* Trans Union
- (4) Contact your bank so they can monitor your accounts.
- (5) Call the Social Security Administration's Fraud line to alert them.
- (6) If you have identity theft insurance, contact your insurance company and notify them of the loss.