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Your body won't go where your minds never been!

The most meaningful thing you can do to provide for your own safety, is to think about various scenarios you might find yourself in, and to think about actions you can take to stay safe. The best example I have, is fire safety. Schools conduct regular fire drill. Every student, teacher, and employee knows exactly what action to take when the fire alarm sounds. The risk – Fire- is identified, and a plan established and practiced. From that point forward, whether it be an actual fire or drill, the brain short cut tells us not only what to do, but how to do it, where to go, what path to take, and where to assemble. By building personal safety shortcuts in your brain, the action you take will keep you safe.

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Bias that Impact Personal Safety

Personal safety is not something that we should only consider when we are doing certain activities. Safety measures are habits we learn, develop and need to practice every day. A sense of safety in our home life, relationships, work life, and in our community is so vital, that when we feel unsafe for whatever reason, we think of little else.

Personal safety is an outcome of decision making. When we are under stress or feel in danger, our brain uses short cuts, or cognitive biases, to make us take a specific action that is good enough at the time. If we had the time to consider all options for a specific situation, we might use our critical thinking skills.

You might recognize this as something commonly referred to as, "Monday morning quarterbacking," or "armchair quarterback." It's fairly easy to make better decisions when there is no stress involved and opportunity to consider all known options, outcomes, and to receive input from others.

We've all seen movies or read books and we can tell someone is making a poor choice. It's easy to see this when we're far removed from the action. It's much harder to make good decisions and take decisive action when we find ourselves in the middle of a crisis. This is true of everyone.

***Hot Dog choking incident**

As I said earlier, personal safety is an outcome of decision making. We are therefore going to break up this in-service into three distinct segments. The first is how are biases affect our decision making process. The second is factors that affect our personal safety and how to trust our instincts. The third is specific actions you can take when preparing and going out for home visits.

There are all kinds of biases in the world. I'm going to focus on three cognitive biases that may impact your personal safety. The first is Anchoring.

1. Anchoring – Influences you to rely too heavily on the first information or first impressions we receive. We use this first information to make judgments regarding subsequent decisions. For example, what would happen if a doctor and researcher wrote a scientific paper linking a specific vaccine to Autism. Regardless of the accuracy of this information or any subsequent proof discrediting the paper, the damage is done.

***Unsafe vs. Safe neighborhoods**

2. Availability Heuristic bias- Making decision based on past experiences, to include what we've seen or heard, but not necessarily a personal story. Heuristic bias allow short cuts in our thinking to make quick judgments on the world around us.

For example, is the world more violent or less violent than in the past 20 years. Heuristics might lead us to reasonably assume the world is more violent today based on what we see in the news and on social media.

***9/11 and the impact of News overload**

We have the ability to see everything as it's happening in real time and not just on the evening news.

I'm not saying we shouldn't respond to our perceptions, but we should develop an action plan and practice it so that we can feel confident that we can react appropriately if it were to happen. DPS has a training mantra, "Your body won't go where your mind hasn't been." When we discuss specific ways to keep safe, these are things to be thought about, used in different scenarios and practiced.

***Practice active shooter response while in office – didn't work out as anticipated**

3. Selective perception bias. Our brains tell us what to focus on and what to filter out. It's based on beliefs and past experiences. It's a process by which we perceive only what we feel is right and completely ignoring the other point of view. We all do this as there is so much stimuli coming that we have to filter it somehow. This can harm our safety when we are generalizing something as the same as us or our experience and therefore "safe" when in reality it's not.

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Factors that impact personal safety

Inattentional blindness

***Driving**

Now that we've talked about Cognitive Biases, I want to talk about Survival signals. **Cite Gaven deBecker's book.**

What I find interesting about these factors is that I'm going to encourage you to use them when you are conducting a home visit. Most of us use them anyway in everyday encounters and don't even realize it.

Rules of Opposites – We are more familiar with favorable behaviors than unfavorable behaviors. For example, if you're in someone's home conducting an interview, a favorable behavior might be that the person gives you their attention and answers the question. They maintain a comfortable distance from you and regards you as a professional and treats you with curtsy. They would ask questions related to

the topic. The reason this exercise is so powerful is that we all know what the favorable list is. We don't know the opposite so well, but you can use this rule to understand when something is inappropriate, unwanted, and should be regarded as a warning sign.

Once you've identified unfavorable behaviors, they become warning signs and you can develop tactics on managing the person who is displaying them. For example:

If the person is distracted and keeps leaving the room – You might acknowledge this and say something like, *"I can see that this might not be the best time for us to meet. If you want to set up an alternate meeting time, we can do that? Or there's only about 15 minutes left, perhaps we can get through this a little quicker. What do you think?"*

If the person seems to be standing too close, *"I really appreciate you helping this study and giving of your time and allowing me into your home. I think we all get a little nervous in new situations, and I'm certainly no exemption. Would you mind giving me a little more personal room? The study still requires us to maintain 6' distance and masked."*

The person treats you with suspicion and is put off by your presence, *"I can see that you may have some apprehensions about the study or about me. Is there any questions I can answer or anything I can do to help?"*

The person asks personal or intrusive questions or is becoming increasingly angry about the types of questions or length of the questions. *"I know that these questions seem to be asking the same thing over and over again. I'm really sorry for that and for it taking up so much of your time. They do this so that they can use what you give us in order to help. I can't imagine doing everything that you do and still agreeing to do this. Thank you so much."*

Forced Teaming – Projection of a shared experience where none exists. Forced teaming works well in de-escalation and negotiations. It can also be used effectively in your home visits. Some of the examples I just gave use the words we and ours.

When forced teaming is a warning sign is when it's trying to gain something against your otherwise better judgment. Let's say that you're wrapping up the visit and the person says, *"Oh, because we've talked for so long, it seems I'm going to be late for work. Don't you hate when that happens to you?"*

Although they never informed you of a time they needed to leave, they've just placed some of that responsibility on you and the visit. They've also just reminded you of a time when you were late for work, which we all hate. What's going to happen next is they will suggest that you can give them a ride. After all, they'd do the same for you.

The Art of Charm –is when someone tries to get passive control of you through using strategies to gain compliance. Rapport building is part of this and a skill often used in effective negotiations. For example, if I am called to help managing a situation that might become violent, building a rapport with the person is an effective de-escalation tool. But if I am using it to try and get someone to trust me and I intend to use that trust to cause harm, then it needs to be recognized and questioned.

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When we're paying attention to personal safety, we Use all of our instincts

1. Fear is an emotion that helps keep us alive.
2. The others on this list are all instincts that we also need to pay attention to. If you're feeling any of them, there is usually a reason for it. For example, if you're feeling apprehensive around someone or in a specific circumstance, pay attention to that feeling and begin to proceed with caution. Think for a moment about the movie, "Taken."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peOU33aPN2g>

I've put the link on my notes. If you haven't seen it, it's starring Lian Neeson about human trafficking. His daughter and a friend land at an airport in France for vacation. They are obviously tourists and are approached by a young man who asks them if they want him to take their picture. They agree. He then asks if they want to share a cab because cabs are very expensive. At this point the audience's instincts are humming, and you can somewhat see apprehension and hesitation on the faces of the two women, but they agree.

What about this in the first few seconds of this encounter that has our instincts waking up and nudging us to pay attention?

- a. Rules of Opposites. The two women are clearly enjoying each other's company. A favorable behavior is to be left alone. An unfavorable behavior is his interruption and intrusion on their enjoyment. A favorable behavior is to offer assistance when it's asked. An unfavorable behavior is to offer to help when it's not indicated. Under normal circumstances, he would not have knowledge of their financial situation which one would assume is favorable as they just arrived and haven't yet had an opportunity to spend any money. How would he know they needed to be thrifty.
- b. Inattentive blindness. He appears to be friendly and helpful, but if he is also leaving the airport to get a cab, as they are, where is his luggage? He doesn't provide any information, such as his destination prior to asking if they can share a cab. How could he possibly know sharing a cab would be advantageous to both parties.
- c. The Art of Charm. He asks the women if they'd like him to take their picture. He is already reaching out to make an assumption of compliance. He asks where they are from, and upon hearing their answer, begins to sing "California Girls" by the Beach Boys. This is intended to build a rapport with the women for his next trick, which is,
- d. Forced Teaming. He uses "we" and "us" statements, and puts them all in the same boat of having to spend a lot of money on a cab, but helping them out by sharing the cost. One of the women is shaking her head no when her friend accepts the offer.

Using Intuition

1. When faced with warning bells, listen to them. You will always be your biggest advocate. Sometimes I think that we let our fear of what other people may think get in the way of common sense. We're taught to be polite, but in reality, if someone is trying to get you to do something you don't want to do, even if you can't pinpoint why, don't do it.

A few years ago we took a report of the theft of a cell phone where a teenager stopped a nursing student on the sidewalk outside Helen Wood Hall. He told her he needed to call his mom and asked if she had a cell phone he could use. She was holding her phone in her hand and it was clearly visible to him. The report stated that as she agreed and handed him the phone, she said, "As long as you don't run away with it." Which of course is exactly what he did. Her instincts told her something was wrong with the encounter, but politeness and a need to help prevailed.

As reasonable and somewhat logical human beings use denial to undermine our own intuitive signals.

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Preparing to make home visits is perhaps the most important factor of maintaining your safety.

Be mindful of your presence on social media. Monitor your privacy settings on sites like Facebook. Also avoid sharing things that could provide others with information about you, your family, where you live, and so on.

As you secure your private information, emphasize the importance to your family and children.

Set Firm Privacy Settings

This is especially true on social media, which is a ripe target for identity thieves and other interested observers.

Google Yourself- you can't know what's out there unless you check.

Stay in Touch. Set up a "call-in" procedure for your office. Always let your co-workers and the boss know where you are and when to expect you to return.

What is the plan if a worker fails to call in or sends an SOS? These procedures should be in writing so the expectations and action plans are clearly communicated.

There are several Apps that can help keep us safe. They are meant to track our locations and send out alerts to trusted contacts if we don't check in. For example, my sister is retired and a full time RVer. She and I use Google maps and enabled the location sharing so we always know the others location if we need it. We have current pictures of each other on our phones along with photos of our vehicles, and in her case I have a photo of her RV. When I send out my notes, there is a list of 5 apps I found on line.

1. "Watch over me" app
2. "bsafe" app
3. "React Mobile" app
4. "Stay Safe" app
5. "On Watch" app

<https://www.pcworld.com/article/2057930/5-personal-safety-apps-that-watch-your-back.html>

Know exactly where you're going. If you've never been in a certain location, drive around the area first. This helps you familiarize yourself with alternative routes if you need them for safety. It also gives you advance knowledge of areas that could pose more risk than others.

Work in pairs.

Vehicle maintenance. Keep your car filled with gas and in good repair. Consider a second set of keys in case you lock yours in the car. **Have car windows rolled up and doors locked.** Vehicles now come with features that won't automatically lock the car door until the vehicle is in drive or over a certain MPH. They will also automatically unlock when the vehicle is put in park. Get in the habit of automatically locking your car as soon as you and your passengers are inside. Disable the feature that automatically unlocks your car doors. You should do this after you are parked, have gathered your belongings, and have taken a few moments to look around at your environment.

Minimize what you bring with you.

Dress professionally and functionally. Make sure your clothes and shoes provide you with ease of movement.

Mentally rehearse the visit and what you need to accomplish. Before heading into a visit, rehearse what the visit will go over and your end goals. Having a purpose and knowing what needs to be done will help you get through appointments more effectively and efficiently. Have a plan in case this gets off track and know when to steer it back or let it go.