



How Criminals Approach Their Victims: The Tactics of Deception and Manipulation

Criminals rarely attack without first positioning themselves for success. Whether their goal is robbery, assault, or psychological control, they rely on deception, manipulation, and surprise to ensure their victim is caught off guard and unable to resist effectively.

Understanding the various methods criminals use to approach their targets can help individuals recognize red flags, enhance situational awareness, and take preemptive action to avoid dangerous encounters.

The Illusion of Friendliness: Disarming Through Charm

Some criminals rely on false friendliness to lull their victims into a false sense of security before striking.

- They may strike up casual conversation, offer compliments, or ask innocent-sounding questions to appear approachable.
- They might pretend to share a common interest or use humor to lower the victim's guard.
- Some engage in light physical contact, such as a handshake or a friendly pat on the back, to test boundaries before escalating.

While not every friendly stranger has bad intentions, it's important to stay aware of unsolicited interactions, particularly if they feel forced, unnatural, or persistent.

The Art of Distraction: Diverting Attention to Move In

A well-placed distraction can shift a victim's focus just long enough for a criminal to close the distance, steal belongings, or initiate an attack.

- A criminal may drop an object, waiting for the target to bend down or turn away.
- In pairs or groups, one person may cause a scene—such as an argument or fake accident—while another moves in unnoticed.
- A sudden loud noise or request for help can momentarily divert attention, creating the perfect window for a strike.

Recognizing unusual distractions and maintaining awareness even when helping others can prevent falling into this trap.

The Blitz Attack: Sudden, Overwhelming Force

Some criminals skip deception altogether, relying on speed and aggression to disable their victim before they can react.

- These attacks are explosive and unprovoked, using brute force to overpower the target.
- Criminals using this method often aim to shock and disorient their victim, reducing the chance of resistance.
- This approach is common in muggings, abductions, and violent street attacks.



While the element of surprise is hard to counter, being alert in vulnerable areas, maintaining strong posture, and having a self-defense plan can increase the chance of survival.

The Fake Good Samaritan: Offering Help to Isolate the Victim

Many attackers exploit human kindness, offering assistance as a way to lower defenses before striking.

- A criminal may pretend to help with a broken-down car, dropped items, or a locked door.
- In some cases, they offer a ride, claiming concern for the victim's safety.
- Once the target accepts help and enters a secluded space, the real attack begins.

While genuine good samaritans exist, it's crucial to be selective about accepting help from strangers, especially in isolated areas. Trust your instincts—if something feels off, decline firmly and move away.

The Fake Authority Figure: Exploiting Trust in Uniforms

Criminals sometimes pose as police officers, security guards, or other authority figures to manipulate their victims into compliance.

- They may flash a fake badge or wear an official-looking uniform.
- Some demand identification, wallets, or phones under the pretense of an "investigation."
- Others order their victims to follow them to a secluded location, where the real crime takes place.

When approached by anyone claiming to be law enforcement, it's always best to ask for official credentials, verify their identity, and avoid going anywhere alone with them.

The Silent Stalker: Studying the Victim Before Striking

Some criminals take their time, watching their target's habits and movements before making an approach.

- They may follow from a distance, waiting for the right moment when the victim is isolated.
- They observe routines, noting when someone is most vulnerable—such as entering their home, jogging alone, or leaving a late-night shift.
- In some cases, they may test the victim's awareness, repeatedly appearing nearby to see if they are noticed.

If someone's presence feels unnatural, persistent, or deliberately hidden, trust your instincts, change your route, and seek help immediately.

Exploiting Weakness: Targeting Physical or Emotional Vulnerabilities

Criminals often assess their victims for weaknesses, choosing those who seem less capable of resistance.

- They look for physical limitations—such as elderly individuals, those distracted by carrying groceries, or those appearing injured.



- They target emotional distress, preying on individuals who seem lost, overwhelmed, or upset.
- Some will test their target's response—moving in closer to gauge if the person reacts, and if not, seeing that as an invitation to escalate.

By maintaining strong body language, walking with purpose, and setting clear boundaries, potential victims can deter criminals who rely on perceived weakness.

The Use of Fear: Intimidation and Coercion

Some criminals rely on verbal threats and psychological manipulation to control their victims before resorting to violence.

- They may demand money, valuables, or compliance, using threats of harm to gain control.
- They display weapons—sometimes real, sometimes fake—to force the victim's submission.
- In extreme cases, they isolate the victim through intimidation, ensuring compliance before an actual assault occurs.

If faced with threats or demands, the best course of action depends on the situation—sometimes complying and escaping is safer, while other times, drawing attention and resisting is the best defense.

The Social Engineer: Mastering the Art of Deception

Some criminals use elaborate lies and false identities to gain a victim's trust before striking.

- They may pretend to be someone from the victim's past, claiming to be an old acquaintance.
- Some use fake online profiles, luring victims into in-person meetings under false pretenses.
- In romance scams, criminals build emotional connections before exploiting them for financial gain or physical access.

Being cautious about who you trust, verifying identities, and avoiding private meetings with strangers can help prevent falling victim to social engineering tactics.

The Slow Infiltration: Gradual Manipulation Over Time

Some criminals don't strike immediately—instead, they build rapport with their target, slowly gaining proximity through repeated, seemingly harmless interactions.

- They may start with casual conversations, remembering small details to seem familiar.
- Over time, they test boundaries, gradually getting closer, physically and emotionally.
- This approach is common in workplace harassment, predatory grooming, and long-term scams.

Recognizing early signs of manipulation and establishing firm boundaries can prevent these threats from escalating.

Conclusion: Recognizing and Disrupting Criminal Approaches



Criminals use strategy, deception, and psychology to get close to their victims before making their move. Recognizing these tactics in action is the first step in avoiding potential threats.

- Stay alert to unusual behavior—if something feels off, trust that instinct.
- Be cautious with strangers—not every friendly face has good intentions.
- Maintain control of your personal space—step back, reposition yourself, or leave if needed.
- Set boundaries and be assertive—don't hesitate to say “no” or disengage.
- Have a plan—whether it's self-defense training, carrying a personal safety tool, or knowing escape routes, preparation is key.

By staying aware, setting boundaries, and recognizing predatory tactics, individuals can outthink and outmaneuver criminals before they ever have the chance to strike.