



How Criminals Choose Their Victims: Understanding the Selection Process

Criminals don't choose their victims at random. Whether for robbery, assault, or other violent crimes, offenders follow a calculated process to maximize their success while minimizing the risk of resistance or capture. By understanding the criteria criminals use to identify potential victims, individuals can take proactive steps to make themselves less appealing targets and reduce their likelihood of being attacked.

Criminals seek out those who appear weak, unaware, or isolated, taking advantage of situations where they can act with minimal interference. Recognizing these risk factors can help individuals adjust their behaviors and environments to disrupt a criminal's selection process before an attack even begins.

Vulnerability: The Prime Factor in Target Selection

Criminals look for victims who seem incapable of fighting back. The less resistance they anticipate, the more likely they are to act.

- Individuals who appear physically weak, frail, or injured are often targeted.
- People carrying heavy bags, pushing strollers, or managing multiple items may be seen as distracted and less mobile.
- Those displaying hesitation, fear, or uncertainty may be perceived as lacking confidence—another key vulnerability criminals exploit.

While physical strength is not always a deterrent, projecting confidence, maintaining good posture, and appearing purposeful in movement can make a significant difference in discouraging an attack.

Isolation: A Criminal's Advantage

The more isolated a person is, the less likely they are to receive help—and criminals know this.

- Walking alone in dimly lit areas, deserted streets, or remote locations increases vulnerability.
- Parking lots, stairwells, and alleyways often provide attackers with cover and control.
- Solitary joggers, commuters, or individuals waiting alone at public transit stops are prime targets.

Whenever possible, staying in populated areas, traveling with a companion, or making use of well-lit and high-visibility routes can reduce risk.

Lack of Awareness: The Dangers of Distraction

A distracted victim is an easy victim. Criminals often observe their targets before acting, looking for those who are preoccupied with their phones, listening to music, or otherwise disengaged from their surroundings.

- Texting while walking reduces reaction time and eliminates peripheral awareness.
- Wearing headphones blocks out auditory cues, preventing individuals from hearing footsteps, approaching vehicles, or verbal warnings.



- Looking down or being deep in thought signals inattentiveness, making someone appear vulnerable.

Simple habits—such as periodically scanning the environment, keeping devices away in unfamiliar areas, and maintaining an alert posture—can make a person far less attractive to an attacker.

Age and Gender: Criminal Stereotypes at Play

Many criminals base their victim selection on perceived physical capability. They often assume that certain age groups or genders will be less likely to resist or escape.

- Elderly individuals, children, and teenagers are often seen as easier targets due to assumed physical limitations or lack of self-defense skills.
- Women, particularly those walking alone or carrying bags, are frequently targeted because criminals believe they pose less of a physical threat.
- Young men, while typically seen as stronger, can also be targets—especially if they appear unaware, intoxicated, or distracted.

While criminals make assumptions based on these factors, projecting confidence, maintaining eye contact, and walking with purpose can disrupt their expectations.

Perceived Wealth: Signs That Attract Criminals

Criminals look for signs of affluence or valuable possessions, assessing whether a target is worth the risk.

- Wearing expensive jewelry, designer clothing, or high-end accessories can make someone more appealing to thieves.
- Flashing large amounts of cash, high-end smartphones, or luxury items in public increases risk.
- Driving an expensive car into an unfamiliar area can attract unwanted attention.

While there is no need to dress down or hide wealth entirely, being discreet about valuables—such as keeping phones in pockets, limiting cash on hand, and avoiding ostentatious displays—can make a person less desirable to a criminal.

Time of Day: When Criminals Strike

Criminals prefer darkness and quiet hours when they are less likely to be seen or interrupted.

- Late-night hours, particularly after bars and clubs close, present high-risk windows when people are tired, intoxicated, or less alert.
- Early morning hours, when the streets are still empty, allow criminals to act without interference.
- Shifts in routine—such as someone being alone when they are normally in a group—can create unexpected opportunities for attackers.

Being mindful of the risks associated with time and location, traveling in groups, and avoiding isolated paths during vulnerable hours can significantly reduce exposure to crime.



Lack of Personal Security Measures: Appearing Unprepared

Criminals assess whether a person seems capable of defending themselves.

- They look for signs that a victim isn't carrying a weapon, personal alarm, or self-defense tool.
- They prefer individuals who seem passive or afraid, assuming they won't fight back.
- They avoid people who appear trained in self-defense, as the risk of injury or failure increases.

Taking self-defense training, carrying a personal safety tool, and walking with an assertive, prepared demeanor can deter criminals from choosing a person as their target.

Intoxication: Impaired Judgment, Easy Target

Drunken or drug-impaired individuals are prime targets because their reaction time, coordination, and judgment are significantly reduced.

- Leaving bars or parties alone and intoxicated makes individuals more vulnerable.
- Being unable to think clearly, notice suspicious behavior, or physically resist makes criminals more likely to strike.
- Crimes involving date-rape drugs or forced intoxication often occur in environments where alcohol is prevalent.

Pacing alcohol consumption, traveling with a trusted group, and staying in control of personal beverages can greatly decrease the risk of becoming a victim.

Unfamiliarity with the Area: Exploiting the Lost and Confused

Criminals target tourists, newcomers, and individuals unfamiliar with their surroundings because they assume these victims won't know where to go for help.

- People who look lost, consult maps, or hesitate at intersections are easily identified.
- Asking strangers for directions or looking for signs of navigation confusion can make someone stand out.
- Criminals may offer unsolicited help, then exploit the situation for robbery or fraud.

To avoid this, individuals should study routes in advance, use navigation discreetly, and move with purpose even when unsure.

Conclusion: Making Yourself a Hard Target

Criminals seek easy prey—people who appear weak, distracted, isolated, or incapable of fighting back. However, by projecting awareness, confidence, and preparedness, individuals can disrupt the selection process and significantly lower their risk of being targeted.

- Stay aware. Keep your head up, scan your surroundings, and avoid distractions.
- Appear confident. Walk with purpose, make eye contact, and maintain strong posture.
- Avoid isolation. Stick to well-lit, populated areas and travel with others when possible.
- Limit displays of wealth. Keep valuables out of sight and remain discreet.



- Have a plan. Know your route, carry a self-defense tool, and trust your instincts.

Criminals look for opportunity—but by taking control of how you move, present yourself, and interact with your environment, you can make yourself a far less appealing choice and drastically improve your personal safety.