



The Criminal's Strategy: How Attackers Position Themselves for an Advantage

Criminals don't just rely on brute force to overpower their victims—they use strategic positioning to ensure they have the upper hand before making their move. By carefully manipulating their environment, exploiting psychological factors, and using the element of surprise, attackers set the stage for a successful assault while minimizing the victim's chances of escape.

Understanding how criminals position themselves before an attack is key to spotting pre-assault indicators, avoiding dangerous situations, and taking proactive measures to stay safe. Here's how they do it.

Cornering: Trapping the Victim in a Confined Space

One of the most effective ways for a criminal to control their target is to maneuver them into a corner or confined space where escape is limited.

- This could be against a wall, in an elevator, or between parked cars, where movement is restricted.
- Attackers may subtly guide their victim into a dead-end by walking closely behind or beside them.
- In some cases, they force a victim to back up into a tight space by stepping aggressively toward them.

When moving through public spaces, it's essential to stay aware of exits and open spaces, avoiding situations where movement is unnecessarily restricted.

Isolation: Separating the Victim from Help

Attackers aim to eliminate potential witnesses and bystanders before making a move.

- Criminals may wait until their target is alone, avoiding areas where others might intervene.
- Some will strike after a group has dispersed, catching the victim when they are least protected.
- They may use conversation or a false sense of security to lead someone away from public areas.

Avoiding secluded areas, staying in well-lit spaces, and making a point to remain near other people can reduce vulnerability to this tactic.

Blocking Escape Routes: Cutting Off Any Way Out

Positioning themselves between the victim and an exit is a common way criminals gain control before an attack.

- In hallways, parking garages, or narrow walkways, they may stand in the only clear path of escape.
- Some attackers work in pairs or groups, with one person initiating interaction while the other positions themselves behind the target to cut off retreat.



- Criminals may intentionally crowd or pressure their target into an area where escape is physically difficult.

Maintaining awareness of exits and not allowing strangers to block your path can help individuals avoid being trapped in a vulnerable position.

Using Obstacles: Impeding the Victim's Ability to Move

Attackers often use the environment to their advantage, strategically placing objects or leveraging existing barriers to make it harder for the victim to escape.

- A criminal may stand between the victim and a door, staircase, or open walkway.
- Some use fences, walls, or parked cars to restrict movement and make it harder for a victim to create distance.
- In indoor settings, attackers may position themselves near furniture, counters, or narrow passageways to make quick exits difficult.

Being mindful of one's surroundings and keeping a clear path to an exit can help prevent getting boxed in.

Exploiting Blind Spots: Attacking from Where They Can't Be Seen

Criminals often position themselves in a victim's blind spot, using angles, obstacles, or the natural limitations of human vision to their advantage.

- Attackers may approach from behind, where reaction time is slower.
- They might stand just outside a person's peripheral vision, waiting for an opportunity to strike unnoticed.
- In parking garages, stairwells, or alleyways, they position themselves behind doors, around corners, or between parked vehicles to remain hidden.

Checking blind spots, using reflections in windows or mirrors, and staying aware of movements around you can help reduce the risk of being ambushed.

Creating Barriers: Controlling the Victim's Movements

A common criminal strategy is to force the victim into a restricted position, limiting their ability to escape or fight back.

- They may walk closely beside the target, gradually nudging them toward a wall, railing, or car.
- Attackers use their body to block movement, making it harder for the victim to change direction.
- Some create psychological barriers, making the victim feel trapped without physically restraining them—this is often seen in intimidation tactics.

By maintaining personal space, standing in open areas, and moving purposefully, individuals can make it harder for an attacker to control their positioning.

Engaging in Conversation: Manipulating the Victim's Focus



Some criminals use friendly conversation as a tool to distract and position themselves for an attack.

- They may approach at an angle or step closer gradually, reducing the victim's awareness of their proximity.
- A criminal might extend a handshake, gesture toward something, or create an excuse for physical contact to test boundaries.
- By forcing the victim to focus on their words, they make it harder for them to notice changes in positioning.

Keeping interactions with strangers brief, maintaining personal space, and watching for unnatural movements can help prevent this form of manipulation.

Feigned Assistance: Leading the Victim into a Trap

Some criminals pretend to offer help, using this act of goodwill as a way to maneuver the victim into a vulnerable position.

- They may offer to carry something, fix a problem, or escort the victim somewhere "safer".
- Attackers sometimes create a fake emergency—such as claiming to have lost something or needing help—to lead the target into a more secluded space.
- Once the victim is in a controlled environment, the true intentions become clear.

Being cautious about offers of help, setting clear boundaries, and staying in public spaces can prevent falling into this trap.

Diverting Attention: Positioning While the Victim is Distracted

A skilled criminal knows that a distracted victim is an easy victim. They create diversions to shift attention while they position themselves for an attack.

- A sudden noise, an argument, or a staged accident may pull focus away from an approaching attacker.
- Some criminals work in teams, with one person distracting while the other moves into place.
- A well-timed request for help or attention-grabbing action can create the perfect moment to close in.

Staying aware of surroundings even during distractions, and keeping personal space even in seemingly harmless interactions, can help avoid this trap.

Ambushing from Hiding: The Element of Surprise

Perhaps the most dangerous positioning tactic is waiting in a concealed location for the right moment to strike.

- Criminals may hide behind objects—cars, doors, bushes, dumpsters—waiting for a target to pass by.
- They position themselves in shadows, stairwells, or blind corners, ensuring the victim has no time to react.



- Attackers often strike in transition zones, such as entryways, parking lots, or stairwells, where victims are focused on their next movement.

Scanning areas before passing through, avoiding unnecessary blind spots, and listening for movement can help detect potential threats before they strike.

Conclusion: Awareness is the Key to Safety

Criminals rely on positioning to control their victims before making a move. By understanding their tactics and recognizing when someone is attempting to manipulate the environment, individuals can avoid being trapped and take proactive measures to protect themselves.

- Stay aware of exits and open spaces.
- Be mindful of people positioning themselves too close or in unnatural ways.
- Trust instincts—if something feels off, create distance or leave.
- Never allow yourself to be led into a restricted or isolated position.

Recognizing these positioning strategies can make all the difference in detecting danger before it escalates—turning awareness into an individual’s first and most effective line of defense.