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From the Store to the Car Door: Parking Lot and Garage Safety

Stores and malls seem to be getting larger and larger. To accommodate more customers, larger parking areas are being built. This may be a great way to make sure everyone gets a spot, but it also means that the farthest spot is farther from the store. For a woman who is alone each step can feel like a mile when you don't feel safe.

There are some common sense things that shoppers can do to help reduce the risk of becoming a victim of parking area crime.

First of all, make sure you lock all of your car doors when you arrive. To make this easier, install a keyless entry system which will allow you to lock and unlock your doors from outside the car. Then, proceed to the store in a brisk, confident manner with your keys firmly in your hand.

When returning to your car, ask for help out, if available. Many grocery stores no longer offer courtesy clerks to help you to your car, but some do. Choose those stores and use the clerks, even if you're perfectly able-bodied and could load your groceries yourself.

Most times you will be sent back to your car alone, however. So try not to be overwhelmed with too many packages if you're on your way back alone. However, if you're like many people, you're not only loaded with packages but may have a couple of kids in hand as well.



Oftentimes, our choice of footwear isn't helpful, either. Try to remember to wear something that grips, won't fall off, and that you can run in when going out and about. If possible, try to plan your shopping trips during the daylight hours, with a friend, or when there are plenty of shoppers.

As you approach your car, start by visually scanning underneath your vehicle as you approach it. Look around at the cars parked near yours. Then, pay attention to the types of vehicles parked on either side of yours. A panel truck or van with side sliding door next to your driver's door is an opportunity for an abductor to kidnap you. Should you be parked next to such a vehicle, get in on the passenger side of your car, and scoot over.



Once next to your car, make a quick visual sweep around the interior before getting in. Don't leave blankets, coats, or other large items lying around the back seat, as they can be used to conceal abductors. Having a keyless entry will afford you precious seconds to open your car, and some come with a panic button, that can set off an alarm if pressed, hopefully drawing some attention to a situation.

As soon as you're inside your car, always lock your door, and have your passengers do the same. Once again, keyless entry systems can lock all doors at once, and many cars come equipped with a master control panel on the driver's door that does the same thing. Another feature currently available automatically locks all doors once the key is in the ignition and the engine is turned over.

The parking area itself should always be checked out. Is it well lit? Are there lots of shrubs, pillars, or greenery that could

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conceal someone? Do you have to park so far away that nobody would hear you if you did call for help? In short, do you feel comfortable? There's a little voice in most everyone's head that sometimes nags at them. Then, another voice overrides it with, "Don't be so paranoid! You're just chicken!♦?"

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Don't listen. Whether it's day or night, three or three hundred spaces away, if you don't feel comfortable, get a store employee to walk you out.

-- *Bob Stuber*



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