20 ways to protect yourself from rapists

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When attacked by rapists, most women try as much as they can to resist, an author and researcher, the late Prof Sue Lees, wrote in The Guardian UK in 2000.  
  
“In my survey, I found women did this in all sorts of ways: by screaming, fighting and biting, running away, refusing to cooperate, pretending they were pregnant or had AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and by attempting to reason,” she said.  
  
Lees, whose research works focused on the injustices of the legal system towards rape victims, said at times, resisting worked for some rape victims while at times it didn’t.  
  
“Much depended on where the assault took place. Most rapes are planned and rapists are careful to isolate their victim first. Resisting may be effective where there is an escape route but in an underground car park or deserted spot, or where faced with an assailant much stronger than oneself, it may not be practicable or sensible,” she said.  
  
Of recent, rape has been a topic widely discussed in the country due to tragic incidents involving the rape and murder of girls who were just starting their lives. The incidents had led to several rape victims coming out to speak of their experiences, especially through social media.  
  
With no end in sight to rape, psychologists have said it is now important more than ever before for girls to start taking steps to protect themselves from sexual assault.  
  
According to a psychologist, Mrs Peace Adefemi, personal safety must begin with women, especially girls who are perhaps more prone to sexual assault.  
  
Therefore, the following are helpful steps (culled from villageofshorewood.org and bustle.com) for girls to protect themselves from rapists.  
  
Install a door viewer  
  
Replace or re-key locks when you move into a new home or apartment. Install a door viewer and a one-inch deadbolt lock and use them. Look before opening your door to anyone.  
  
Don’t let strangers into your house  
  
Require all strangers to show identification. If you haven’t called for a repairman, don’t let one inside. Leave him waiting outside and call his place of business to verify his reason for coming to your house.  
  
Avoid unsafe situations and strangers  
  
If you are being followed while walking, go to the nearest police or any place where several people will be, e.g., a shop or petrol station.  
  
Don’t walk alone at night  
  
As a lady, don’t walk alone at night if possible. Walk with someone, or walk in areas where there are other people. Unless the rapists are many, it will be hard for one rapist to overpower two or three persons.  
  
Engage in passive or active resistance  
  
Passive resistance is to think and talk your way out of a situation. Active resistance is to react immediately to startle your attacker. Use any available item (hairspray, keys, purse, etc.) as a weapon. You can also yell or scream to attract attention. Carry a whistle that will make a loud noise.  
  
Avoid walking in lonely areas  
  
Stay in well-lighted areas, away from alleys, bushes, and entryways. Avoid shortcuts through parks, vacant lots, and other deserted places.  
  
Don’t accept rides from strangers  
  
Don’t accept rides from strangers. If a driver stops to ask you directions, avoid getting near the car. If you are being followed, go to the nearest business or residence for help. If you are harassed by the occupants of a car, simply turn and walk the other direction. The driver will have to turn around to follow you.  
  
Avoid carrying valuables around  
  
Hold your purse close, not dangling, and avoid carrying extra money or valuables around. When you return home, have your door key ready so that you can enter without delay.  
  
Never walk across a parking lot digging in your purse for keys; have them in your hand before leaving the building.  
  
Let your car be in good condition  
  
If you have a car, always ensure it is in good condition. For instance, you don’t want to be driving and get stuck on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway or the Third Mainland Bridg, particularly in the night. Also make sure you have enough fuel in your car to get to your destination. If possible, travel on well lit, busy streets and avoid isolated back roads and short cuts. If you are being followed, drive to the nearest open business for help, or to the police or petrol station.  
  
If you have trouble with your car, raise the bonnet and stay in your vehicle while you wait for your mechanic, family or friend to help you. When someone offers assistance, roll the window down just enough to talk to them. Never get into their car if they offer to get you home.  
  
Don’t carry a stranger  
  
Women driving alone, don’t stop to help a stranger in a stalled vehicle. Proceed to an open business, and report the stalled vehicle to the police.  
  
Take a self-defence course  
  
Taking a self-defence course like karate is a great way to work off some adrenaline and help keep yourself safe. You may never have to use these moves, but the confidence of knowing how to protect yourself will show in your stride.  
  
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Party responsibly  
  
With recreational prescription drugs now common among youths, it’s easy to accidentally make yourself prone to rape at a party. Hence, avoid such drugs. Excessive alcohol can also incapacitate you. If you are intoxicated, with alcohol, drugs, or both, you are unable to consent to sex. But unfortunately, that will present an opportunity to a rapist.  
  
Date rape drugs are becoming more common and can be easily slipped into an unattended beverage without leaving any visible trace or odour. When you are at a party and you have to step away, finish your drink before stepping away. But if you can’t finish the drink, don’t drink it again when you return. If you still feel like drinking, buy a new one.  
  
Trust your instincts  
  
If something just isn’t right, speak up, whether you are on a date with someone and you suddenly feel uncomfortable or watching someone carry a drunk girl up the stairs at a party. Do your part to stop sexual assault by being vocal.  
  
It’s also okay to lie in some circumstances. If something about a location or situation feels off to you and you want to leave immediately, don’t feel bad about making up an excuse. Your safety is your most important concern.  
  
Keep your online life private  
  
This is definitely hard to do with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the self-disclosure they all promote. You may already know by now that putting your address on the Internet is incredibly dangerous, but also think twice about sharing your current location. Try to refrain from tagging your location every time you post, and definitely use the privacy options to your advantage. If anything, it will keep you safe and give you an element of mystery.  
  
Tell a trusted person your movements  
  
Don’t leave your house without telling at least one person where you’re going and who you’re going to meet.  
  
If you’re dating someone, make sure you let someone close to you know about the person. If you’re going on a date with the person, tell the trusted person. This may seem like it’s stripping you of your freedom, but remind yourself that you aren’t asking permission, you are only keeping yourself safe.  
  
Speak up  
  
If you hear someone making light of sexual violence or condoning it, speak up. If you see someone being harassed or assaulted, call the police right away.  
  
Help others  
  
You may be a potential rape victim but you may see one and it can be intimidating to approach such a situation alone. Therefore, enlist another person to support you.  
  
For instance, you can ask someone to come with you to approach the person at risk. When it comes to expressing concern, sometimes there is power in numbers.  
  
Ask someone to intervene in your place. For example, you could ask someone who knows the person at risk to escort them to the bathroom.  
  
Be conscious of your environment  
  
It’s hard to resist scrolling through texts or cranking up an inspiring playlist when you’re walking down the street, stuck in traffic, or on morning jog.  
  
“But being distracted from your immediate environment ups your odds of becoming a target. So unplug, open your eyes and ears, and clue in to what’s going on around you,” Avital Zeisler wrote on shape.com.  
  
Note the people on the street, if there’s a foot or car traffic, and whether you can quickly dart into a nearby house or store in case a creep appears. You’ll get good at sizing up potentially threatening situations and getting out of them before anything happens.  
  
Imagine how you’d react in dangerous situations  
  
Zeisler, who is a rape survivor, recommended that girls should imagine how they would react when in a dangerous situation.  
  
She said, “You know how a fire drill familiarises you with what to do to make it out of a real blaze? It’s the same principle here. Visualising yourself being threatened by an attacker ahead of time lets you do a mental run-through of the right way to respond at the moment.  
  
“That would be by staying calm, looking for an escape route, and then, if necessary, physically fighting your attacker off. Sure it sounds scary–who wants to think about being victimised? But it’ll actually help you come up with practical, effective responses you’ll remember if it happens.”  
  
Use force as a last resort  
  
Zeisler said force should be used when other strategies had failed.  
  
She said, “Fighting back raises the stakes. But if an attacker is approaching and there’s nowhere to run, it’s an option that can save your life – thanks to the force of the blow combined with the element of surprise. Memorise and practice these easy, effective, no-black belt-required moves now, so you’re prepared.  
  
“Shin kick: Lift your leg and drive the length of your shin to your attacker’s groin, drawing on the strength of your hips for more power.  
  
“Palm strike: Drive your outer palm into your attacker’s chin, nose, or jaw. As you push upward, draw on your core muscles to deliver as much force as possible.”  
  
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