

# CROWD CONTROL, FLASH MOBS, AND YOUR SAFETY

How to stay safe in public spaces during an emergency.



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## Introduction

On January 8, 2011, a 47-year-old man waited for a train in a Washington, D.C. subway stop when two pre-teens began punching and hitting him. Several teenagers watched and video-recorded the event. While the victim screamed for the attackers to stop, not a single person on the crowded subway platform offered to help. No one called the police.

This situation is an example of how a crowded public place can turn into a dangerous space within seconds. Public emergencies such as this one are not new to the world, nor are they commonplace. In fact, there are mass shootings on record in the 1940s, and statistics show that violent crime is actually down compared with what it was a few years ago.

However, statistics aside, there's no denying our public safety is at risk. Crowds behave in very distinct ways, and that is why it's imperative that we all consider the best way to respond before an emergency takes place.

In the following pages you'll learn about the psychology of crowds and what happens when a potentially dangerous situation arises in public. This guide is not meant to scare you or create unnecessary hype. Rather, at Home Security Store, we recognize that personal safety isn't only required within the home. We all need to look out for ourselves and our neighbors no matter where we are.

As a community we need to pull together. Please join us.

Sincerely,

The Home Security Store Team



## Understanding Crowd Behavior

Imagine this: You are walking down a sidewalk on your way to work. The street is quiet; there are no cars in sight. You see one person walking about 20 feet in front of you. You're minding your own business and thinking about your day when all of the sudden that person falls to the ground.

What do you do?

Now imagine a second situation. You are walking down the same street on your way to work, except this time the street is filled with cars and the sidewalk is lined with pedestrians. As you go along your way you notice a person about 20 feet in front of you falls to the ground.

Do you stop? Do you call 911?

Studies have shown that in the first scenario you will most likely assist the person, but in the second scenario it's likely you will not assist. It's called the Bystander Effect.

### Bystander effect defined

People often do not intervene in an emergency situation if there are others around. The Bystander Effect theory became popularized by social psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley after the 1964 stabbing death of Kitty Genovese in New York. Kitty was killed in front of an apartment building while 38 people watched.

Experts say the Bystander Effect has three causes:

1. An individual assumes that someone else will step in and help. The more people in a crowd the less responsibility a single person feels. It's called **diffusion of responsibility**.
2. When in a group setting, a person reacts in accordance with those around. So, if no one else appears shocked or troubled, then that **social influence** makes the individual feel that the situation is a non-emergency.
3. Because there is a lot more going on in a crowded space, someone may not notice an event or details of what's around them.

### The human urge to follow the crowd

We all want to be free-thinking individuals with motives and aspirations all our own, but the truth is that we do follow the crowd in subtle, unconscious ways.

One recent study done by Cell Press and published in *Neuron* found that when an individual disagrees with group opinion the brain sends signals that something is wrong. The mechanisms of the brain are designed to comply with what's around us. The bottom line: Your brain does not want you to be too different from others.

This social conformity may be part of the reason why large crowds move in particular ways. Another study discovered why humans move together much like birds flock.



In the study, featured in the article, "Consensus decision making in human crowds," which was published in *Animal Behavior Journal*, a group of people was directed to walk around a large room without any particular order. Only a select number of participants were given information about how and where to walk. None of the participants could speak.

In the experiment, the informed individuals were eventually followed by others in the group as they walked in a snake-like formation. Researchers found that it only takes 5% of a crowd to influence the remaining 95%. This is exactly how individuals get swept up in a crowd.

Now that you know how our brains work in a crowd, let's look at the types of dangerous emergencies occurring in public.



## Types of Dangerous Public Emergencies

The following descriptions of public emergencies do not cover every possible public emergency or crime. This is simply a brief overview of the types of crises you could face when in a public setting.

### **Crowd crazes and stampedes**

When everyone in a crowd rushes to be front and center at a concert, for example, it's called a crowd craze. When that same crowd of people fear for their safety and start to run for the exit, you call that a stampede. Both can be incredibly dangerous as people can get pushed, elbowed, stepped on, and, worse, crushed.

### **Gang violence**

The number of gang members has doubled since the 1990s (the U.S. Justice Department National Gang Intelligence Center estimates there are close to one million gang members), and gang membership even reaches into suburban and rural schools. Gang violence may be part of initiation, rivalry, a money-making scheme, or for other reasons, all of which could include violent crimes such as public shootings, theft, and rape.

### **Terrorism**

According to the FBI, "There is no single, universally accepted, definition of terrorism. Terrorism is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as 'the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.' (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85)." Terrorist acts include hostage situations, bombings, assassinations, and more.

### **Random acts of violence**

As mentioned earlier in this guide, it's not uncommon for individuals to be harassed, assaulted, or robbed in broad daylight. Whether committed by a group or by a lone offender, crime and violence could occur anytime, anywhere, and by seemingly innocent-looking people.

### **Flash mobs**

Flash mobs have become an increasingly popular occurrence in the country's malls, train stations, and other public spaces. Flash mobs, or the sudden formation of a group of people doing the same set of tasks, are not new, but thanks to social media and cell phones it has become easier for large groups of people to coordinate mobs. While some flash mobs are for fun or for marketing purposes (like this T-Mobile-coordinated flash mob: <http://youtu.be/VQ3d3KigPQM>), some flash mobs are used as a mechanism for theft and other crime.

In fact, a National Retailer Federation survey found that 80% of surveyed retailers had experienced these multiple-offender crimes in a six-month period. One in ten of those surveyed claimed to have been hit by a criminal flash mob.



## Do Not Live in Fear. Things Are Safer than They Appear.

On July 20, 2012, a gunman entered an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater and shot and killed 12 people, leaving 58 others wounded. The media responded with non-stop coverage for weeks following the event. The public, while intrigued by the coverage, complained of over-reporting.

Why were we giving the suspect attention? Would the media coverage encourage copycat crimes? What had become of the world?

Because of media coverage like this, many Americans believe that the crime rate is much higher than it is. According to a 2010 Gallup Poll, two-thirds of Americans thought crime was higher than it was the year before and that crime was continuing to increase. But the truth of the matter is that the crime rate, including burglaries and violent crimes, was and is lower than it has been since the 1980s when the crack-cocaine epidemic ran rampant.

The media is not solely to blame for the public misconception. In that same Gallup Poll study, it was stated that public perception of crime is strongly connected to "widespread dissatisfaction with the state of the U.S. today." It has been found that during strong economic times most of the public perceives crime to be lower.

Others claim that violent television shows and movies play a role. Given our current recession and the media's tendency to sensationalize crime, it's no wonder we live in fear.

### Mass shootings: Not common and not new

Less than 1% of murders result from mass shootings, and while recent shootings, such as the one in Aurora, Colorado, make us feel more vulnerable, these public shootings are nothing new. A CNN online report showcased the worst U.S. mass shootings, which included the following:

- In 1949, a World War II veteran shot and killed 13 of his neighbors.
- In 1966, a man killed 16 and wounded 30 from atop a campus tower at the University of Texas in Austin.
- In 1984, a man shot and killed 21 children and adults at a McDonald's.
- In 1991, a man drove his car through the wall of a restaurant in Texas, and then shot and killed 23 people.

## How to Stay Safe When Emergency Strikes

Hopefully by now you're more familiar with the types of public emergencies to be on the lookout for, and now you're ready to learn how to keep yourself safe while out on the town. Here are a few tips.

### **Above all, notice what is around you.**

According to Ken Trump, the security expert behind SchoolSecurityBlog.com, certain crimes will continue to occur as our economy struggles and mental illnesses go untreated, so it's imperative that people turn off their phones and open their eyes in order to be prepared.

In Ken's post, "Prevent mass shootings? Aurora theater, Sikh temple, & schools," he says that you need to be aware and prepared, but not scared, and that means shutting off all electronics when in public and paying attention to what is around you. Essentially, life should not be about "me." It should be about "we."

### **Plan for an exit as you enter.**

Always take the time to look for exits when you arrive at a new place. The way that you entered may not be the best way to exit during an emergency. Again, it's about noticing what is around you.

Speaking of taking notice, can you describe the person who sits next to you or stands behind you? Don't glance at people mindlessly. Make eye contact and pay attention to personal details such as hair color, tattoos, clothing, and so on.

### **Prepare in advance.**

In an emergency situation you do not know how you will react. You may panic or you may freeze. You may run screaming. You may fight back. These are instinctual responses.

Experts suggest you prepare for an emergency by having a plan, which could include the following:

- Taking self-defense classes
- Acquiring a CPR and first aid certification
- Carrying [pepper spray and/or a personal alarm](#)

### **Be smarter than the crowd.**

As you learned earlier, a crowd craze or a stampede could result in death. Follow these tips from WorldNomads.com, a travel safety website:

- Don't bend or sit while in a large crowd. Stay upright with your hands near your chest.
- Try not to panic or yell. Instead, gesture to those around with pointing and waving.
- If the stress of the crowd is too much, ask those around you to pick you up and crowd-surf you away from danger.
- Help others by holding their hand and keeping them upright.





### **Run. Hide. Fight.**

In August 2012, the Houston, Texas, Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security released a controversial video titled "Run. Hide. Fight." to instruct people on what to do in the event of a public shooting. As the title indicates, there are three steps:

1. Run first. Make it your priority to get out of harm's way. Bring others with you, but don't let them jeopardize your safety.
2. Hide behind locked doors and large objects if you can't get out of the dangerous location safely. Turn off lights and cell phone ringers.
3. Fight if your life is in danger by aggressively using common objects as weapons. The video shows people using chairs and fire extinguishers as weapons.

Watch the entire video here: <http://youtu.be/5VcSwejU2D0>

### **"If you see something, say something."**

The Department of Homeland Security initiated the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign after the 9/11 attacks to encourage every individual to report suspicious activity to police. The public service announcements were originally used for the New York City subway system, but now Major League Baseball, the National Football League, and other sports associations have followed suit.

To ensure public safety, it is critical that you call for help anytime you see something suspicious or out of place. Always seek help in an emergency. Don't assume someone else will call.

### **What you need to report to authorities.**

It is your responsibility to report all crimes and emergencies. According to the Department of Homeland Security, it is most helpful to provide the following information:

- Brief description of the activity
- Date, time, and location of the activity
- Physical identifiers of anyone you observed
- Descriptions of vehicles
- Information about where people involved in suspicious activities may have gone
- Your name and contact information (optional)

### **Where to go from here?**

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide and for learning about how to stay safe during a public emergency. We know that we've only scratched the surface of this enormous topic, so we invite you to share your thoughts with us on the Home Security Store [Facebook page](#) and on [our blog](#). We also invite you to print out the following page, which includes eight quick tips for staying safe in a public emergency. Please share these tips with your friends and family. Let's all do our part to help keep each other safe.



# Eight Quick Tips for **STAYING SAFE** in a Public Emergency

1. **Stay calm.**
2. **Move slowly** and keep a steady pace if it is crowded. If you can run, run, but keep your knees and elbows up high. Don't stand around waiting. Move!
3. **Look ahead of you.**
4. **Pay attention** to those around you. What are people saying? Does someone look guilty? Dangerous? Take note of what they are wearing and other personal details.
5. **Look for alternative exits.** The direction of the crowd may not be the best route.
6. If you can't escape from a dangerous situation involving gunfire, **hide behind locked doors and heavy objects.**
7. **Call 911.** Don't assume someone else will call.
8. Once you are in a safe place, **offer to help others** who need it. Again, don't assume someone else will offer help.



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## About Home Security Store, Inc.

Home Security Store is the premiere online ecommerce website specializing in home security, including: affordable DIY wireless and hardwired security systems, security cameras, fire alarm systems, spy equipment, survival gear, and more. The company brings together highly-trained, professional technicians and a state-of-the-art product line to provide the most comprehensive home security source found online. The company offers FREE and FAST shipping, plus FREE tech support. For more information go to [www.homesecuritystore.com](http://www.homesecuritystore.com).

