

Being on a college campus is fun but it's easy to gain a false sense of security and feeling of safety when surrounded by your peers. After all, they're just honest students like you, right? Wrong.

It's important to acknowledge and remember that you don't always know who you can trust, even when you're in the college campus bubble.

While the threat of danger may not always be your first assumption, it's important to be prepared should a situation ever present itself.

Additionally, there are easy ways to prevent yourself from becoming more vulnerable than necessary or putting yourself into potentially harmful situations.

While we certainly hope that these situations won't arise, it's always best to be prepared for any given situation, just in case.

Whether you're going to college for the first time or are returning for another year, it's important to review and remember top safety tips to ensure you're taking the right precautions.

The following college safety tips can help you avoid dangerous situations or help you should you find yourself in a risky situation.

1. Don't allow technology to make you unaware of your surroundings

Everyone with headphones, a smartphone and an MP3 player knows – the minute you're plugged in, you barely exist anymore! You stare at your phone, zoned out; not knowing what is going on around you. This, in essence, is exactly what you should be avoiding. When you start to find yourself becoming unaware of what's going on around you is the time you need to consider turning the music down, putting your phone away and opening your eyes to what's happening. The key to getting out of a potentially dangerous situation is to recognize it as such. This is nearly impossible if you aren't even aware of the situations you're walking into.

2. Never walk alone at night

On average, sexual assaults and other crimes are more likely to occur at night. And while you shouldn't scare yourself into assuming danger is around every corner, you also shouldn't take unnecessary risks, such as walking alone at night. Walking around alone and in the dark is basically asking for trouble. Sure, there are times that you need

to get from point A to point B which may occur at night, but you should always abide by the buddy system so that, should something happen, you're not on your own.

Next Step: Can't avoid walking alone or heading to an unfamiliar location? Download a personal safety app, such as [Safetrek App](#), which was developed for college students. When you walk alone, launch the app and hold your thumb down on the safe button. Once you're safe, release your thumb and enter your pin. If you need help or are in danger, releasing the button without entering your pin will notify local police of your location.

3. Utilize locks

Just as you wouldn't leave your house without locking the front door, don't leave your dorm or apartment without locking up — even if you're planning on only being gone a few minutes. If you live on the first floor, close your windows and either shut the blinds or hide your valuables in drawers any time you leave.

Next Step: Purchase a small safe or dedicate a drawer for storing your laptop, iPad, and other valuables when you're away from your room. If you use a safe, keep it hidden in a closet. If you live on the first floor of a building, make sure your windows lock. If they don't, you can purchase a sliding window lock or security bar .

While it's easy to become relaxed in college life, there are some habits that should always remain standard. Locking your doors, especially when you're alone or asleep, should be one of them.

Aside from allowing yourself to be vulnerable, it's also much easier for theft to take place if you're essentially providing easier access to burglars.

4. Carry some emergency cash

It's good to have some cash on you at all times, just in case. Perhaps your credit card won't work or your debit card gets lost. You never want to be stuck in a scary situation because you don't have the necessary funds to get out of it as quickly as possible.

5. Locate the emergency system areas on campus

Every school has a Campus Safety or security office, and part of your tuition funds it. Make the most of this resource by utilizing its services. Your college's website likely provides information like office hours and phone number, but you can also visit in person when you arrive on campus.

Next Step: Call or visit the Campus Safety office and request information about their programs. Find out if your campus has the following services and how you can take advantage of them:

- Blue light emergency phone stations
- Campus escort services
- Safety maps with suggested secure routes
- Support for a safety app like [Campus Safe](#)

Should you ever find yourself in trouble, it will be much easier if you know where you can call for help.

6. Be careful when getting into your car.

Most people don't think to look in their backseat or under the car before getting behind the wheel. A predator could potentially be hiding in one of those locations, however, especially if you tend to leave your car unlocked or keep your windows rolled down. When walking to your car, approach at an angle that allows you to see around the vehicle, and check the back seat before opening the door.

Next Step: Lock your car doors and engage your car alarm every time you leave your car, even if you're running just a quick errand. If your car doesn't have an alarm feature, consider buying one.

7. Know your way around campus

In addition to paying attention to your surroundings; you should *know* your surroundings as well.

Take time to become familiar with campus landmarks and streets so that you are able to navigate your way around – or out of an area, should you need to.

Next Step: Download your campus map onto your phone and use your GPS to find popular, highly trafficked routes to get to your destination. Apps like [Campus Maps](#) can also help you find your way around your school campus. Always try to avoid walking along deserted paths, and when in doubt, stick to the routes with which you're most familiar — even if they take a little longer.

8. Understand your campus's and city's crime.

The more you know about the crime in your local area, the better you can prevent similar incidents from happening to you. Most colleges and universities provide on-campus crime statistics, and several websites offer a thorough overview of a city's crime rates, including the type of offense and specific locations where the crime occurred.

Next Step: Research your college's reported on-campus crime by visiting the [U.S. Department of Education](#). If you have specific concerns or questions not addressed by the site, contact your school's Campus Safety office for more information. Use a site like [City-Data.com](#) to learn more about the crime within a particular city.

9. Never stay at a party when your friend leaves

No, you don't need to call it an early night just because one of your friends does. But, what you should do is ensure you always have a minimum of one person with you that you know (and know you can trust).

Being alone in a party setting isn't smart – go home if you're going to be alone because it is not worth the risk to stay – no matter how nice everyone there seems.

10. Party Safely

If you're getting to the point that you don't have control of yourself or your surroundings, you need to stop and think about the types of situations you're putting yourself in.

It's far too easy for others to take advantage of you or a situation if you can't think or act rationally. Don't Let Strangers Pour Your Drinks or hand you an opened bottle. There are a lot of creeps out there with date rape drugs in their pockets just waiting to slip them into your drink. Males are not immune from this either. Let the bartender pour your drink or pour it yourself.

11. Always have emergency contacts on you or in your device

If you have a smartphone, program emergency numbers into it. It's one of the first spots hospitals check if you're admitted alone because they are able to bypass your pass code in order to access your contacts.

Additionally, list your important emergency contact numbers and information in your planner, if you carry one. Whatever items you have on a regular basis are good spots to keep emergency information.

12. Consider carrying pepper spray, a whistle or taking a self-defense course

The hope is certainly that you'd never need to make use of these defense mechanisms, however, having them with you can make a life-saving difference in harmful situations you otherwise might not be able to get out of.

There's nothing more empowering than knowing how to protect yourself physically. You'll feel safer and more confident, especially if you live or travel alone. You don't need a black belt in karate to master self-defense; all you need are a few classes and tips from a professional instructor. There are several types and styles of classes from which to choose, depending on your interests.

Next Step: Sign up for a self-defense class in your area, such as Krav Maga or jiu-jitsu. These classes are often available at colleges and gyms. If you're feeling shy or nervous, ask a few friends to take the class with you. Pack your chosen safety supplies into a small kit, and fasten the kit on a key ring, lanyard, or backpack. These items should be easy to grab at any time, as they won't do you much good if they're buried at the bottom of your bag.

13. Maintain privacy on social media.

Social media is a great platform for connecting with friends and family worldwide or sharing updates about your life. However, with everything you post, stay aware of who else could be viewing your profile. Avoid geotagging your photos, as it reveals your location to strangers, and don't publicly announce when you're home alone or are leaving your home unattended.

Next Step: Review the settings on each of your social media profiles. Disable location services, make your accounts private, and think twice before sharing anything. Remember: once something gets posted on the Internet, it's tough to remove it entirely.

14. Know Your Rights.

Students need to know their rights regarding sexual assault and crime victim support. The Clery Act stipulates that schools must provide information on campus security policies and practices, along with educational materials, training, and aid to all students. Too often, crimes go unreported because victims do not feel justified in seeking help.

College is an incredible and rewarding experience. But as busy as you'll be with adjusting to independence, new classes, and new friends, don't forget to stay safe and maintain awareness. Following these nine simple steps can significantly increase your chances of having a safe and successful school year.