

Everyone wants to feel safe in the places they live, work, and visit. Each year, the FBI and the MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) track the number and types of crimes reported to law enforcement. The good news is that according to the 2018 BCA Uniform Crime Report, Minnesota's crime rate for the most serious crimes continued to decline. This crime rate peaked in the mid-1990s at around 4,500 crimes per 100,000 people and has steadily declined to the current rate of 2,215 crimes per 100,000 people. While this is great news, you may still find yourself having concerns for your safety.

An important part of feeling safe is knowing that you have the skills and tools needed to protect yourself. The most important skill in staying safe is situational awareness. Our world is full of things that can easily capture our attention. Cell phones, books, and even conversations can absorb our attention to the point where we are no longer taking notice of the sights and sounds occurring around us. In many settings, this isn't a problem. But some settings require greater attention to what is going on around you. There may be physical hazards present, like the fountains people walk into because they are paying too much attention to their cell phone. Or, there might be a criminal watching for a victim who isn't paying enough attention, making them an easy mark. Maintaining an awareness of your surroundings is the first key to keeping yourself safe. There are plenty of books, blogs, Facebook pages, and videos devoted to maintaining situational awareness. If you feel you need help developing this skill, I recommend you find a resource and work on building this skill.

De-escalation is another key to keeping yourself safe. The ability to diffuse an emotionally charged situation before it turns to violence is a powerful skill. Stopping violence before it can start will always be safer than having to respond to violence. De-escalation can be as simple as removing yourself from the situation or calling law enforcement. De-escalation can also include a number of conversational techniques employed with the goal of disarming a person's anger and bringing a greater sense of calm to a situation. If you're not quite sure what that might look like, we have a resource to help you. The Benton County Sheriff's Office has a YouTube channel that can be found by searching for "Benton County MN Sheriff" on YouTube. On our channel we have posted 3 training videos on topics related to threats in the workplace. The video entitled "Anger Management" provides the viewer with a number of de-escalation tactics that can be employed both in the workplace and in your personal lives. As with situational awareness, a number of other resources on de-escalation exist for those looking to build on this skill.

Finally, if you find yourself in a potentially violent situation and you have exhausted every other option you may be forced to physically defend yourself. In order to do so, you will need either the skills or tools to protect yourself. For those physically able, there are a number of options both in person, online, and in print that will give you instructions in various ways to defend yourself. Often just having a basic understanding of these skills and the proper times to employ them give people a greater sense of security and help diffuse feelings of helplessness. A variety of personal safety tools exist for those looking to employ them. Should you choose to obtain one of these devices, it is important to have a complete understanding of how to carry, store, and deploy these devices safely. A device improperly deployed can be turned against you. A device improperly carried or stored may be found by a child or someone else and lead to a tragedy. Whether you choose to employ a taser, mace, handgun, or other tool be certain you obtain proper training in the device and are legally authorized to carry the item.

While this world can sometimes seem like a very uncertain place, we can take comfort in knowing that we live in an area and a time where violent crime is relatively unlikely and people live and work in safety. Practicing the skills above can help add to your level of personal safety.

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.