Shopping Center Security

by Chris E. McGoey, CPP, CSP, CAM

Shopping centers come in all sizes from the giant regional malls to the small strip-center with only a few stores. What they have in common is a parking lot. This is where your family is at greatest risk because of the "nature" of a shopping center parking lot. The most common violent crimes committed in the parking lot are stranger-on-stranger purse snatch and strong-arm robbery and occasionally carjackings and abductions.
If you think about it, we are all strangers in a large parking lot. Violent criminals can blend in with the rest of us and get in close proximity fairly easily. Criminal predators can walk right by us and we will allow it because of the public setting. Next time you go to a large shopping center sit in the parking lot for a few minutes and observe how easy it would be for a criminal predator to approach and attack you or your family. Shoppers walk to and from their cars totally consumed by their thoughts and thinking about what they are going to do next. Watch shoppers as they approach their cars fumbling for their keys. They will turn their backs and attention completely away from those nearby to load their shopping bags into the car, and get children and infants installed inside the vehicle. Most shopping center and parking lot abductions and carjackings occur precisely at this point.

Awareness is Best Defense

To protect your family in this setting the best defense is awareness. Awareness will allow you anticipate the potential danger and plan ahead for the next time you go to a shopping center. Planning includes selecting a safer time to shop (daylight) and arranging not to shop alone if possible. You can plan where to park (i.e. not next to a large enclosed van) and in high traffic areas. You can plan to scan the area for suspicious males before parking and exiting your vehicle. You can also plan not to park or exit your vehicle if suspicious males are in the area. Families should agree in advance to exit and enter their vehicle quickly and lock the doors. Families should be trained to look around their vehicle before approaching and retreat if anyone suspicious is loitering in the area. They should be trained to return quickly to the shopping center and alert mall security or call the police. A little awareness (educated-paranoia) is healthy and can keep your family safe.

For additional security tips please visit Mr. McGoeys website; www.crimedoctor.com . We thank Mr. McGoey for allowing us to share his security expertise with our members.