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TRUST YOUR GUT

Got a funny feeling things aren't right? Listening to your sixth sense could help you stay alert to danger

“Last summer, I was waiting for a bus when a guy driving by stared at me so intently I felt uncomfortable,” says Kate Thomas, 21, an admin assistant from Bath. “Minutes later, he drove back and asked for directions so quietly I had to lean into his car. He was staring at me rather than listening. I told myself I was being paranoid, but then he opened the car door and tried to pull me in. If the bus hadn't arrived, I dread to think what could have happened.”

Kate told herself her uncomfortable feeling was illogical but, say crime experts, your gut instincts exist to warn you of danger. Lizzie Bruce, spokesperson for personal safety charity The Suzy Lampugh Trust, reports, “Ninety per cent of women who call us for help after being attacked say, ‘I had this feeling something wasn't right but I told myself I was being silly.’”

“Your gut instinct is made up of subconscious observations about your situation that send a ‘red flag’ to your brain,” explains Dr Lori Beth Bisbey, a clinical psychologist who teaches survival skills for victims of attack. “It could be just an uneasy feeling in your stomach or your scalp prickling.”

“If it doesn't feel right, it's not right,” agrees Neil Thompson, director of security-

risk company Red24 and a former National Crime Squad detective superintendent. Follow Cosmo's self-protection plan...

YOUR SIXTH SENSE SAYS:

“My taxi driver's taking me the wrong way”

“If you know you'll be travelling alone in an area you aren't familiar with, take a map so you've got an idea if the driver really is going the wrong way,” advises Bisbey. “Always take a licensed taxi and text the details of the driver's ID card to a friend. Call someone to say where you are and when to expect another call saying you're at your destination. Ask the taxi driver which way he's going and use your gut instinct to gauge his reaction; if he's evasive or aggressive, get out.”



YOUR SIXTH SENSE SAYS:

“A guy wants to buy me a drink but there's something weird about him”

“Alcohol lowers your defences and it's common for attackers to target women who look unsteady on their feet,” warns Thompson. “Never accept a drink from a stranger because you have no way of knowing what's in it. Say a firm ‘no thanks’ but don't be rude – if he's dangerous, you could antagonise him. Steer clear of dark corners and, if you can't find your friends, tag onto another group of girls.”

YOUR SIXTH SENSE SAYS:

“Maybe this short cut wasn't such a good idea”

“There may be nothing to fear but why take the risk?” says Bisbey. “Take the longer route if it's well lit and there are more people around. If you're already halfway along your short cut when you start to feel uncomfortable (and you know where it takes you), hurry. If you don't know where it goes, turn back. It's OK to look a bit scared; showing strangers you're aware of your surroundings

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is a good defence mechanism. Take your iPod off, walk quickly and do frequent 360-degree scans around you."

YOUR SIXTH SENSE SAYS:

"There's a strange atmosphere in this train carriage"

Always be aware of risks in empty train carriages, both night and day, says Thompson. "A potential attacker will look at a vulnerable person and assess whether he has the opportunity to commit the crime and get away. If you can move to a busier carriage, do. If not, sit near the door so you can see everyone getting in and out. Check their behaviour; are they paying too much attention to you? If someone sits next to or behind you, get up quickly. Your gut instinct should be telling you if a situation is developing. Remember, the emergency chain is in the train for your safety, so if you're really scared, use it"

YOUR SIXTH SENSE SAYS:

"A man's asking for directions but it's late and I'm alone"

"How did he approach?" asks Bisbey. "If he touched you to get your attention, don't stop. A stranger invading your space could signal trouble. If he's not too close and you're in a safe-feeling neighbourhood, point him left or right quickly and move on. Avoid saying you don't know because you're not local as it might make you more vulnerable. It's OK to ignore him and keep walking. If he follows you, try to enter a premises rather than run down the street in case he's faster than you. If there's no shop, pub or garage, ring the doorbell of a house where lights are on." ①