



Stranger Danger Isn't Just for Children

Most of us grew up hearing the phrase *stranger danger*. We were taught not to talk to strangers, accept lifts, or take sweets from people we didn't know. Yet, as adults, we often forget those same lessons.

Criminals understand human behaviour. They know that most South Africans are polite, helpful and willing to trust someone who appears genuine. Rather than using force, many criminals first build rapport, gain confidence and lower their victim's guard before committing theft, fraud or even violent crime. Whether you're approached in a shopping centre, at a petrol station, outside your office, or even online, a seemingly innocent conversation can sometimes be the first step in a carefully planned crime.

Criminals Often Use Trust as a Weapon

Modern criminals don't always rely on intimidation. Instead, they rely on psychology.

They may:

- Pretend to need help with directions.
- Claim to have a mutual friend or business connection.
- Ask to borrow your cell phone for an "emergency".
- Offer an unbelievable bargain or investment opportunity.
- Pretend to be from a bank, courier company, municipality or law enforcement agency.
- Strike up casual conversation while observing your valuables or routines.

Their goal is simple: gain your confidence before taking advantage of you.

Remember: Criminals Rarely Look Suspicious

One of the biggest misconceptions is that criminals are easy to identify.

In reality, they often present themselves as:

- Well-dressed
- Friendly and polite
- Professional and knowledgeable
- Calm and confident
- Helpful and approachable

Their appearance is designed to earn your trust-not raise suspicion.



Protect Yourself

Simple habits can significantly reduce your risk.

- Keep conversations with strangers brief and professional.
- Never share banking details, PINs or one-time passwords (OTPs).
- Avoid displaying expensive jewellery, cash or electronics unnecessarily.
- Be aware of who is watching when using an ATM.
- If someone makes you uncomfortable, move towards a busy, well-lit area.
- Verify the identity of anyone claiming to represent an organisation.
- Inform family or colleagues if you're meeting someone you've only spoken to online.
- If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

***Be courteous. Be confident.
But above all, stay alert.***

Trust Your Instincts

Your intuition is one of your best personal safety tools. If an interaction feels wrong, if someone invades your personal space, asks unusual questions, or creates unnecessary urgency, remove yourself from the situation. You don't owe anyone your time, personal information or access to your belongings simply because they appear friendly.

Stay Aware, Stay Safe

South Africa faces unique security challenges, making situational awareness an essential part of everyday life. Being cautious does not mean becoming fearful or unfriendly - it means recognising that trust should be earned, not assumed. A few moments of awareness could prevent financial loss, identity theft or becoming the victim of a more serious crime tomorrow.