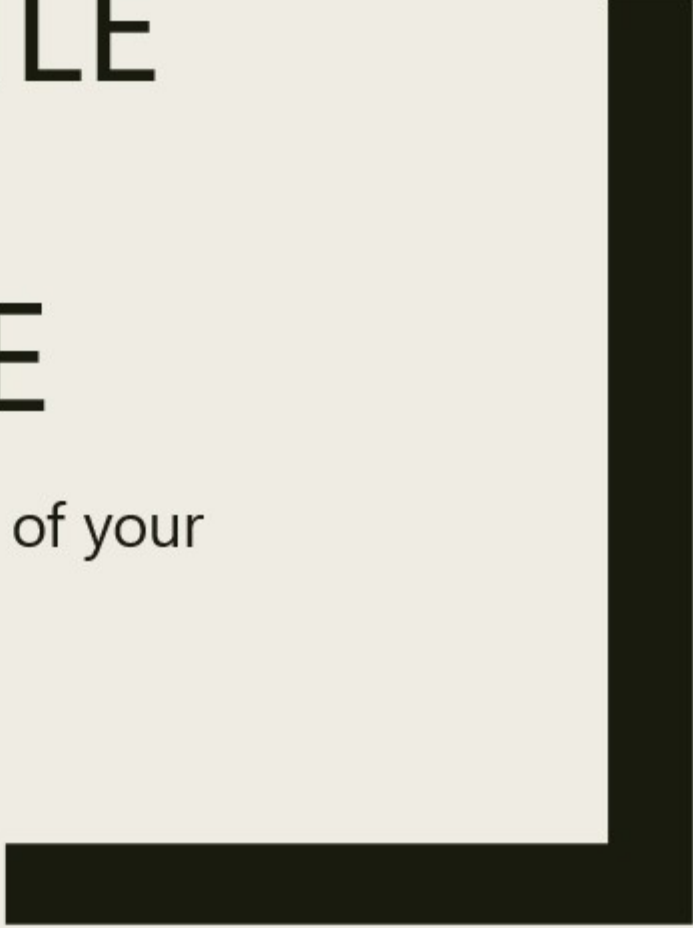




RUNNING WHILE FEMALE: STAYING SAFE

Addressing the realities and challenges of your
female runners



Introduction

- According to a survey by Runners' World, 60% of females respondents have been harassed while running (up from 43% in a similar 2017 survey)
 - *25% reported experiencing sexual harassment regularly*
 - *91% of women have changed their behavior due to an incidence of harassment*
 - *8% feel fear for their safety on most runs*
 - *11% have stopped running because of the harassment*
- A 2019 survey from Stop Street Harassment reported that 68% of women have experienced sexual harassment or assault in public places

Live Poll:

Female runners:

- Do you run alone outside?
- If so, have you ever felt scared or nervous while running alone?
- And have you ever been followed or threatened?

My own personal survey

- Over 150 respondents of self-selected females who already run outdoors alone
 - *91% of respondents have felt scared or nervous while running alone*
 - *53% have been followed or threatened*
- When and where are these women running alone?
 - *20% only run during the day*
 - *10% only run in well-populated areas during the day*
 - *43% run during the day OR in well-populated areas before dawn or after dusk*
 - *27% run any time, anywhere*

So what are women doing about it?

- Most of the “solutions” available to women are geared at RISK AVERSION (or risk reduction) not RISK ELIMINATION
- Raising preparedness among female runners before something happens
- Raising awareness among male runners
 - *Increased compassion*
 - *Increased willingness to look out for females running solo*
 - Warn others of suspicious activity they might be approaching
 - avoid being unintentionally creepy (it happens)

Plan a run safely

- Bring your ID. Or wear a Road ID or something like that
- Bring your phone. Just do it. And make sure it's charged.
- Leave your headphones at home
 - *Or at least get open-ear headphones or wear only one earbud*
 - *Or at the very least turn the volume low enough that you CAN hear rustling off in the bushes or footsteps behind you*
- Pull your hair into a bun, not a ponytail or a braid (harder to grab)
- Know the route, or program it into your watch. Looking lost makes you a target
- Check with local runners or Strava heatmaps to see if your route is popular and/or safe (usually if it's popular, especially with female athletes, it's probably safe)
- Do not use public bathrooms in parks in the dark without a buddy. If it's an urgent matter, try to find an open business (most will understand female runner safety if explained)

Be that friendly runner

- Make eye contact with everyone you see on your route. Smile and say “hello” or “good morning” (sometimes I even throw in an “I like your hat”, etc to spice it up)
- Pros?
 - *Deters an attacker: you have noticed him and he knows it. You’d be more likely to be able to identify him or describe him to police*
 - *Keeps your attention on our surroundings so you notice more*
 - *Other people have interacted with you and are therefore more likely to be able to describe you or intervene in a dangerous situation (the bystander phenomenon)*
 - *You were friendly to other people, how is this ever bad?*
- Cons?
 - *None really other than maybe you say “good morning” at 7pm to someone and get a little embarrassed?*

A Friendly watchdog

■ Checking in with a friend:

- *Before/after a run*
- *Sharing the planned route and estimated time*
- *Sharing live tracking through GPS data*
 - Available with devices and apps like Strava, Garmin, AllTrails
- *71% of my survey friends check in with a friend for every solo run*
- *61% use live tracking for every solo run*

■ Pros?

- *Someone will be able to alert authorities if something happens to you with your precise location (or at least the route) and time*
- *Also helpful for injuries or wild animal attacks (snake bites, etc)*

■ Cons?

- *There is no one with you to act as a deterrent or help you identify or avoid potential threats*
- *If you bonk hard on a run (or unmentionable issues), there are "witnesses"*

A literal watch dog

■ Running with your dog?

- *52% of my surveyed friends do, especially in the dark*
 - *(87% of my surveyed friends who live with a dog will run with it though)*

■ Pros?

- *A good deterrent: most would-be attackers do not know how the dog would react and therefore are more likely to wait for a target unaccompanied by sharp teeth*
- *More eyes watching for danger: your dog is probably watching the bushes rustling better than you (there could be a squirrel!)*
- *Someone to talk to is always nice, right?*

■ Cons?

- *Poop bags. Yuck.*
- *Dog can trip you or pull you or be really ridiculously lazy (like mine is) and it can be difficult to do a workout (like speed intervals) with a furry companion*
- *If you don't have a dog (that's obvious, but its true. If you don't already WANT a dog, don't get one just to keep you safe while running. They're a lot of work just for that)*

Self-defense aids

- Personal siren or alarm
 - *19% of my survey respondents*
- Pepper spray
 - *42% of my survey respondents*
- Small weapon like a hidden knife
 - *31% of my survey respondents*
- Taser or stun gun
 - *8% of my survey respondents*

Personal alarm

- Works by pressing a button and/or pulling a pin to make a loud sound (usually heard from reasonably far away) to draw attention to your location
- Pros?
 - *Easy to carry and use*
 - *Many come with a light that can provide additional visibility*
 - *If accidentally activated, no one is harmed*
- Cons?
 - *Relies on bystander intervention (or the threat thereof)*
 - If in an isolated area or remote trail it is unlikely to help
 - *Must be regularly charged (or have functioning batteries)*



Pepper spray

- Works by pressing a button to release an eye irritant that should temporarily disable an attacker
- Pros?
 - *Obstructs attacker's vision, often providing opportunity to run away*
 - *Can be used on dangerous wildlife if trail running (coyotes, geese, etc.)*
- Cons?
 - *Attacker is wearing glasses or sunglasses*
 - *Can irritate your own eyesight*
 - *Can be difficult to control the amount and direction of the spray*



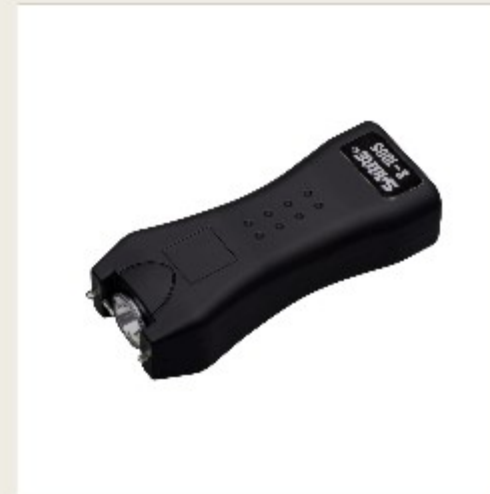
Personal defense weapon

- Usually a small ring or such that conceals a knife or other weapon, or a pocket knife
- Pros?
 - *Can physically harm and disable your attacker effectively*
 - *Does not requiring charging or refilling*
- Cons?
 - *Attacker must get very close*
 - *You must be confident and willing to inflict harm*
 - *Illegal in many states (it is legal in Texas, but can be punishable by fines of \$1000 or up to 1 year in jail in some states)*



Stun gun or taser

- Handheld device that will release an electric charge when connected with a human body and activated with a button. The impact of the charge is typically severe enough to confuse and disable an attacker for several seconds
- Pros?
 - *Less risk of permanent harm than a knife*
 - *Can be more effective at disabling the attacker than pepper spray*
- Cons?
 - *Bulkier to carry and must be easily accessible*
 - *Must be charged*
 - *Can be less effective (or even minimally effective) through clothing*
 - *Prohibited in some states*



Live Poll:

Female Runners:

- What methods do you currently use?
- Do you use or do anything that I haven't mentioned?

What do I do?

- Bring my phone and my ID; wear my hair in a bun, not a ponytail or braid
- Leave my headphones at home or bring my open-ear headphones and listen to audiobooks/podcasts quietly enough that I can hear everything
- Tell a friend my planned route, mileage, and estimated finish time and check in at the end of my run
- Plan my run during the daylight hours (generally in my neighborhood or safe, well-used routes and greenways)
- Make eye contact with every person I see and greet them kindly; inspect my surroundings and regularly note places where a creature could hide
- If I need to run in the dark I take my dog or meet a running companion (if neither is available, I will personally chose the treadmill)

What do I do?

- Over the past 2.5 years I've run more than 5,000 miles. More than 2/3 of those miles have been alone and outdoors.
 - *I've had somewhat weekly encounters with catcallers or rude guys (the "hey, you're pretty fast for a girl" or "nice legs" type of dudes)*
 - I usually just ignore this since most encounters seem innocuous, but they do remind me that creeps are out there
 - *I've been followed by a car three times, all in the middle of the day in broad daylight*
 - Each time I have run, as fast as I can, to the nearest heavily-trafficked street (which I *always* know where they are for this reason)
 - *I've encountered many coyotes, several bobcats, a mountain lion once, and other wildlife (foxes, boars, porcupines, etc)*
 - This is when I've used my pepper spray, go figure

How can the men help?

- Be compassionate and be empathetic
 - *Most of the time I know I've overreacted to a situation that frightened me*
- Volunteer to be that friend
 - *Live track your runner friend, meet up for an extra run (or bike alongside if you've maxed out your mileage), wait around at the parking lot if she ran back out for extra miles*
- Inspect your surroundings
 - *If you see something "off" you can notify other folks heading towards the danger*

How can the men help?

- Organize and invite others to group runs
 - *Sure it's easy for you to just run your neighborhood at dusk, but going out of your way to create more opportunities for your female runners to run safely is helpful*
- Recruit other women to talk about women's safety
 - *The information is usually better received coming from a female. It's unfair, but usually true. Sympathy and experience can only truly come from another woman.*
 - *If you notice one of your female runners is nervous, get her in contact with one of the many seasoned female coaches*
 - If you don't know anyone else: ME. I will ALWAYS talk to anyone you send my way.

How can a coach help?

- Remind everyone of group runs
 - *SARR has so many options: make sure your runners know about them via emails or social media*
- Remind all your runners to be aware of their surroundings
 - *Not just for human predators, but animal and vehicular ones too*
- Recon the route and identify possible areas of concern
 - *Warn runners where those are (or if they look sketchy, but are safe)*
- Encourage a buddy system for runners and encourage them to keep in contact with PLs
 - *If you see someone standing alone before a run, start up a convo and find out her pace and connect her with a running buddy (or run with her yourself)*
- Take personal responsibility for runner safety
 - *Do not leave until every runner comes back safely.*
 - *On an out-and-back route have the faster PLs tell you who the last runners are and make sure they get back*

In summary

- The vast majority of women have been harassed on a solo run
 - *About half of the women have been followed or threatened*
 - *Very, very few have been attacked on a solo run*
 - *But we are *always* aware of the possibility, and that is an entirely different mindset to have for every run than most men*
- Women are considering far more factors for each run than most men would
 - *The best we can do is strive to avoid as many risks as we can and mitigate those that we can't*
- Women are still out there running. Only a few have stopped entirely, but most women lace up and face it anyway



QUESTIONS?