



# **AVOID, ESCAPE, SURVIVE**

**How To Avoid Danger, Escape A Deadly  
Threat And Become A Good Witness**



# AVOID, ESCAPE, SURVIVE:

## HOW TO AVOID DANGER, ESCAPE A DEADLY THREAT, & BECOME A GOOD WITNESS

By Ed Combs

Associate Editor | *Concealed Carry Magazine*

Concealed carry is about security before it's about shooting. In fact, in a best-case scenario, there isn't any shooting at all, and these are a few of the best ways to avoid the kind of nightmare that shootings bring into your life. You're going to keep your loved ones and yourself safe by making the right decisions, and the time to start thinking about making those right decisions is right now.

Situational awareness, though an excellent concept and practice, is just part of an effective personal protection plan. Anyone who would smugly assert that "situational awareness will always

keep you out of trouble" is either very lucky, very inexperienced or a liar (and possibly all three). Without the necessary tools and skills to act on it, situational awareness will only alert you to when you are about to be attacked and allow you to think about how badly you wish you'd decided to carry a gun for a few more seconds.

Sometimes situational awareness helps you avoid a disaster altogether. Sometimes it alerts you to when and how you'll have to act to prevent a disaster, and sometimes it takes a backseat to moving, watching or shooting. The following are a few pointers on how to keep out of harm's way and, if you wind up in harm's way, how to sidestep or stop it as effectively as possible.

# AVOID, ESCAPE, SURVIVE

Concealed carry is all about crisis mitigation and emergency lifesaving. However, the main goal of any responsibly armed American should be to avoid violence whenever possible. Violent encounters make for losers all around; even if you emerge alive and victorious, your life is irreparably changed and you may be physically or mentally injured after having no choice but to employ deadly force against an attacker. This is why violence is best dealt with in the following fashion: Avoid, Escape, Survive.

## AVOID

If possible, don't be where violence is happening. This means trusting the hair on the back of your neck and that all-too-uncommon quality we like to call "common sense." If it seems like there's about to be violence, get out. If it seems like the kind of place where violence is more likely to happen than in other places, don't go there.

You will almost always have control over where you have to go and how long you have to stay there. If you follow the old cardinal rule, "Don't go stupid places with stupid people and do stupid things," your chances of ever facing a deadly threat will be very low. "Very low" isn't "zero" though, and this is why we plan ahead.

## ESCAPE

If violence is taking place, you need to escape as quickly and effectively as possible. Part of this is proactive; when you enter a room or building, immediately scan for exits and cover, meaning anything that will actually stop a bullet. Understand that you may have to make a hasty exit, and game out the best way to do so. Understand and internalize that escaping — what the more cynical folks might call running away — is a far better option than shooting it out.

Unless doing so would result in death or great bodily harm, it is always better (as a private citizen) to escape violence than to fight it. Escape — removing yourself from the scene of an attack that's about to be perpetrated upon you — should always be "Plan A." That said, the first-line plan sometimes falls through, which is why we carry firearms.

## SURVIVE

Whether you can escape the violence or not, your goal is to survive and to wake up the next day as healthy as possible. Your survival may depend on your ability to quickly run to a flight of stairs, or it may depend on your ability to spot trouble brewing before it boils over. Your survival may rely on your ability to put bullets exactly where you need them to go while under duress, or it may rely on your ability to keep a cool head and get your gun out and up as quickly as you can. All of these skills and abilities require attention, training and alertness, all of which are factors that are mostly under your control.

You carry that firearm so you will not be subject to attack by violent predators. Between your training on how to move, how to think and how to handle that firearm, you can and will survive.



# SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Ask any cop and he'll tell you that successful career criminals follow patterns. Ask any big-city cop and he'll tell you that street criminals follow patterns to an even greater extent than other criminals, especially when it comes to victim selection.

In the February/March 2015 issue of *Concealed Carry Magazine*, our own Kevin Jamison, Esq. compared a criminal sizing up his victim to a shark giving something a "bump bite" — lightly nudging and maybe nibbling at something he comes across to see if it's worth taking larger bites of. Sharks do this simply because everything they see in the ocean is potential food; the only question they really have is whether the number of bites necessary to move the item from swimming to digesting will be worth the effort.

As you've probably come to expect, Jamison is absolutely correct. Violent criminals aren't like you or me; I hate to use blanket terms like "you or me," but since you're likely the kind of person who takes concealed carry classes and applies for permits, you've pretty well distinguished yourself from our criminal class. The outlaws of this country have literally zero empathy for you or others; if they did, they wouldn't make their livings threatening strangers with death for cash and cell phones. They consider armed and strong-arm robbery honest trades, and they will think nothing of murdering you if it is to their advantage. Oh, they'll sometimes say they don't want to *have* to ... but that disinclination from murder is related to the longer prison sentence if apprehended, not because they think murdering people is wrong.

One of the anti-gun media's most successful weapons in their arsenal is their ability to portray self-defense-oriented gun owners as heartless psychopaths. They will literally exploit the corpses of children to do so. They will compare me, a private citizen who elects to carry a defensive weapon every day, to rapid mass murderers. This type of misrepresentation of defensive gun owners is compounded by the fact that one of the most common manners in which violent criminals execute muggings in this country is through faux panhandling. This leaves the armed citizen in an extremely dangerous bind — physically and socially.

In the previous issue, I ran down the most common ruses used by home invaders, and in this issue, I'll list the most common techniques used by muggers and street criminals to approach, assess and decide whether to move on potential

victims. Now, as we so often say, situational awareness is the cornerstone of a Personal Protection Plan. If you're aware of your surroundings, that means you'll be scanning for potential threats, which means watching all of the people in your general area. While this might sound daunting, it comes easily after conscious effort is applied. Not to compare life in the United States to wartime, but I once heard a Vietnam combat veteran sum up the human's natural abilities for survival quite well:

"One does not have to learn how to survive in the jungle; those things are already there. And when you're in combat and you're in the jungle, then those instincts come back. *They've always been there.*"

This is not to say that you need to look at every person as if he or she is about to try to kill you. This is to say that it is mentally possible for you to remove the blinders that a lifetime of personal electronics and a general lack of danger have given you. After you begin to consciously watch and keep tabs on everyone in your immediate area, you'll find that less and less effort is needed as time goes on. Eventually, it's something that you'll do unconsciously. Attaining this level is easier for those who have lived in a large city for most of their lives and for those who are accomplished hunters. And I don't suppose I have to say that combat veterans and law enforcement officers usually possess the skills at higher levels than others.

## IMMEDIATELY REACHING OUT FOR A HANDSHAKE

This technique is extremely dangerous and is most common when the street person in question intends to physically feel out his possible victim in an attempt to discern whether it's worth the risk of him and his associates initiating the attack. This is an especially common tactic in high-stakes muggings during which a group of men target adult males who, though typically more difficult to overpower than the elderly or females, usually have a larger quantity of cash on their persons.

There are several reasons why these high-stakes muggers will try their hardest to shake hands with you. For one, as soon as the handshake begins they've immediately tied up your dominant hand and, even worse, have a hold of your dominant hand with *their* dominant hand. (They usually run on the assumption that everyone is right-handed, as the vast majority of the population is.) The next step in the process is to squeeze and see what kind of pressure they get back. If the hands of the target feel strong and rough, they are much less likely to engage or, if they do, the violence will be significantly swifter and more intense.

The last time I experienced this old chestnut was in Las Vegas. A group of four men simultaneously stepped out from a bus shelter of sorts and asked if I knew how to get to a hotel. The first man to make contact immediately stuck his hand out to shake mine as the other three fanned out to my two sides and rear. Under most circumstances, this is what doctors refer to as “being royally screwed.” Unarmed, I got my hands up, pulled my elbows in toward my sides and quickly moved to my southwest, breaking the plane formed by the rear and left-side men and turning in to face the group I could sense I was likely about to get to know a lot better. They began to reposition for the same plan of attack: One man at each compass point.

Fortunately, I’d continued walking ahead of a group of three friends who then walked around the corner and immediately closed on the group of strangers. This resulted in said strangers’ vociferous denial of intentions no one had accused them of having and their quick dispersal. I played it off to my friends as nothing, but the fact is I knew just as well as the four criminals did that I was about a second away from one of the longer minutes of my life.

## THE PRESENT

Since the vast majority of times when someone hands us something it’s something we want, we average Americans will readily accept anything offered to us. (The next step is that we look down at it, studying it in an attempt to understand why we want it.)

Tricking you into physically taking and holding something draws your attention to whatever you’ve just been given and

gets your eyes down, off of your attacker. Depending on the size of the object, it might also occupy both of your hands, thus leaving you exposed to an attack.

The first time I experienced this ploy was in Puerto Vallarta. I was sitting at an outdoor bar on the beach when a disheveled, shirtless man approached the couple at the table next to me. The shirtless man was holding a small bouquet of flowers with a note attached to the bound stems. He handed the flowers to the seated man — who had the table between himself and the beach — and speaking very quickly in broken English, he asked the guy for a cigarette. As the man at the table simultaneously tried to get hold of his cigarettes with his left hand, accept the bouquet with his right and read what was on the attached note with his eyes, the shirtless thief simply scooped up the man’s phone, sunglasses and what appeared to be a small stack of peso notes and fled about as quickly as I’ve ever seen a barefoot human run. (Ironically, the victim’s smokes were unharmed.) Now, in this case, the attack was nonviolent, but stop and think for a moment: As completely occupied as he was, how vulnerable to assault was the tourist who was lucky enough to only lose his phone and shades that day?

I’ll tell you how lucky. Handing someone a note or other attention-grabbing device is as old as premeditated violent crime. I’ve even seen cops fall for this trick. They approach an individual who they suspect is breaking the law (usually alcohol- or drug-related), and the individual tells them, “Ah yes, I have something I need to show you. Thank God you’re here, officer.” Then he hands the cop a note, and in the split second the LEO is no longer focused on the suspect, he’s off like a shot. (I will refrain from naming the two different agencies

# WANT MORE LIFESAVING TRAINING LIKE THIS?

Subscribe to *Concealed Carry Magazine* today to get practical firearms training that’ll transform you into a **more prepared protector**. In every issue, you’ll read real-world stories of armed self-defense, learn drills that can help even the most seasoned shooter and gain insight from industry experts — all guaranteed to turn you into the most confident gun owner you’ve ever been...

[www.GetConcealedCarryMag.com](http://www.GetConcealedCarryMag.com)



I've seen this one work on, as I am certain there were rather intense shift meetings the next morning.)

## **BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE IT ALL?**

Some, or all, of the aforementioned techniques will be used in conjunction to execute the robbery, but until the first order is issued or blow is landed, it will look to the untrained eye as though nothing more nefarious than panhandling is happening. Americans are a generous sort, and since we as a people have been forcibly socialized to never turn a blind eye to a beggar, violent criminals have done what they always do: exploit the good nature of honest citizens to their own ends, maiming or murdering in the process if they deem it necessary.

Faux panhandling is the preferred method of affecting a robbery because it begins with a "defensible honest question," meaning if violent criminals decide to abort the attack at the least second, they can tell police that they were simply panhandling or asking for a short-term loan to get back to community college. If they decide to continue, the "panhandling" might manifest itself in a request for money, a cigarette, a light or a ride. More importantly, it will likely be a combination of all of the techniques mentioned above.

The biggest factor in the panhandling ploy is that if the exchange turns violent and you are able to effectively defend yourself, attackers will tell responding police that they were just minding their own business asking strangers for money, and some crazed, gun-wielding madman drew on them. (This is why we here at CCM are so adamant that if you ever, under any circumstances, have to draw your weapon, you need to call 911 and report the incident as soon as possible; the first to initiate police contact will almost certainly be viewed by the legal system as the victim.)

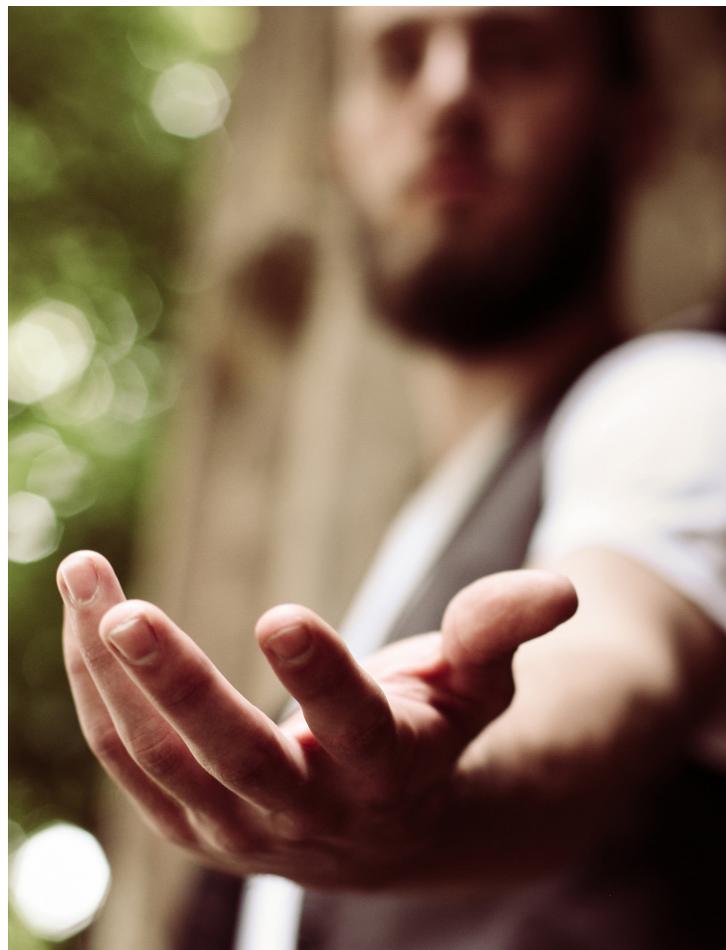
Since it is extremely important that you establish what's happening for what it is — a violent crime in progress being perpetrated on you — vocalization is very important. Tell panhandlers that you are not interested in anything they have to offer and will not be giving them any money. If they continue to press you, keep moving away from them and state in no uncertain terms that you feel threatened and that they need to get away from you immediately. As with any other potentially violent encounter, it's far better to avoid it than to win it, and with luck, your assertive refusal to be involved in the goings-on will be enough to get them to try their luck with a different victim.

Despite the rolled eyes and disapproving stares from oh-so-compassionate individuals in the area, never feel bad about backing away from panhandlers and clarifying your situation. If they're friendly, you can make up for it later. If they're not, you might have just saved your own life. Whenever strangers who aren't uniformed law enforcement officers approach you in public, there's a series of actions that you must take in order

to be able to avoid a violent confrontation and, failing that, stay alive:

1. Get off the X – don't be a stationary target
2. Turn to see everyone else in the area - watch for someone watching YOU
3. Say you don't have any money – keep saying this as many times as you have to
4. Tell them you're in a hurry – keep moving
5. Be ready to defend yourself – mentally prepare for possible violence

Whether or not to give money to destitute beggars is entirely up to you. More often than not, religious beliefs and obligations dictate an individual's behavior when panhandlers ask for a handout. Regardless of how you feel about alms for the beggars, remember this: If the individual initiating contact with you is healthy and energetic enough to approach you quickly for a handshake and dexterous enough to move so swiftly as to never really seem to be in the same place for more than a second or so, what's kept him or her from getting work? More importantly, what seems more likely: He or she is in an honest-to-God tough spot, like the man or woman sitting nearly motionless next to a cardboard sign that reads "STARVING," or that this



person is bump-biting you ... and seeing if you're worth the effort?

## BEING A GOOD WITNESS

There are times when the greatest service you can offer is to be a good witness. This means you should take in as much of what's going on as possible without actually getting involved. A prime example of this could be when you've contacted law enforcement — and they are en route — but there isn't a clear and unavoidable threat of death or great bodily harm. This



is also extremely important when you are rendering aid to a victim of a violent attack; not to be melodramatic, but you may be the last one who speaks to this individual for a while, and many victims don't remember as much after waking up in a hospital bed as they do before they lose consciousness. If you're in a position to collect information to relay to law enforcement, you're going to want to keep the following in mind:

### PROTECT YOURSELF

Just because you're trying to be a good witness doesn't mean that the situation won't turn dangerous. As you observe a situation, never lose sight of the fact that you and your loved ones are your highest priority in the area; if the threats in the area escalate to the point that you are no longer in complete safety, get out.

### LOOK FOR SPECIFICS

You're going to be looking for information that will be useful to law enforcement. Vehicle descriptions are extremely helpful in apprehending violent criminals; you'll be looking for type and color, number of doors, license plate state and characters, and roof racks, bumper stickers or other identifying marks. When observing a person, do what you can to get down approximate height and weight, ethnicity, hair color and length, presence or absence of facial hair, clothing and jewelry. Remember that height and weight can be extremely difficult to gauge, so look for reference points in rooms and on buildings to help you gauge an individual's height. Banks, convenience stores and other businesses often have white tapes marked in feet and inches on their door jambs specifically for measuring fleeing attackers; make it a habit to start noticing them now before you might need to.

### LISTEN

Voice and dialect can be extremely important in identifying attackers, as can remembering specific statements they make. There's a good reason everyone from law enforcement officers to attorneys to Special Forces soldiers all carry notepads and pens: They understand that even with all of their specialized training, no one is capable of remembering everything he or she hears and sees.

### KEEP PERSPECTIVE

Bear in mind that you're not a law enforcement officer; you always have the option of fleeing a dangerous situation. A concealed carry permit does not give you any more responsibility to help others than you had before it was issued, and attempting to insert yourself into violent encounters can (and often will) do far more harm than good. Your concealed firearm is for defending your loved ones and yourself against impending, unavoidable death or great bodily harm.

# EFFECTIVE USE OF COVER

By Kevin Michalowski

Executive Editor | *Concealed Carry Magazine*

The first rule of winning a gunfight is to ensure that you don't get shot. Getting shot greatly reduces your chances of emerging victorious. Yes, you can and should — to the best of your ability — fight through any injury and continue attempting to defeat your attacker no matter what. But doing that with a bullet hole in you is all the more difficult. The best way to avoid incoming rounds is to place some sort of barrier between you and your attacker. You have two choices: cover or concealment.

Cover is anything that will stop incoming rounds. Cover is dense, solid and impenetrable. Cover offers you the best chance to avoid the impact of bullets coming your way. But you need to use cover correctly in order to maximize its protective effects; more on that later.

Concealment simply hides you from your attacker. Concealment is better than nothing because it, at the very least, obscures your outline and does not give your attacker the opportunity to acquire a perfect sight picture. Concealment will not stop bullets, and in a perfect world, concealment is simply a brief stop on the way to cover.

A car door is concealment; an engine block is cover. An interior wall made of sheetrock and paint is concealment; a brick

wall is cover. Bushes and shrubbery are concealment; a 12-inch tree trunk is cover.

Any cover is better than concealment, and there are some items and locations you might not think of as cover. A fire hydrant is cover. A curb can be cover if you are able to get down on the ground. In both of these cases, you will need to get as much of your body as possible behind the cover. Again, any cover is better than nothing. You must use what you have available. A simple steel file cabinet likely won't stop a bullet, but if that cabinet is filled with paper — depending on the angle of the bullet — you have something that will adequately protect you.

There is a saying I heard often while serving in the U.S. Navy: Do all you can with what you've got where you are. That's how I feel about the use of cover and concealment, except that we must understand we need to be looking for and moving to cover. You can't just stay in one spot. You need to move, and that movement needs to be getting you to cover.

A big part of proper situational awareness is to regularly make note of escape routes and areas of cover or concealment. Now that you are carrying a gun you should be looking at the world differently.





➤ *Moving — specifically, moving properly — during a lethal force encounter is a skill that is best practiced before it's needed.*

You should be paying attention to the elements of the world around you and thinking about what you might do should you suddenly find yourself in a very bad situation.

For instance, as you are walking down the street, you see a big, blue, metal mailbox and a smaller concrete planter filled with dirt and sporting a nice arrangement of colorful flowers. The mailbox is closer to you. If you hear a shot or suddenly find yourself in what we will call “a bad situation,” your first immediate move might be directly toward that big, blue mailbox to assess the situation. You should immediately be thinking, “I’m out of sight, but this box is really only two pieces of sheet metal. I need better cover.”

As you assess your ability to use the planter for cover, you’ll also have to be thinking about the size of the planter, how long it will take you to get there and whether or not you can get behind it effectively. Remember too that the flowers sprouting out the top of that thing are only concealment. The real cover is the concrete and the dirt. The planter is clearly the better choice for cover, but you need to consider all the elements of that piece of cover before you make your move.

There are a million combinations of situational factors and all are unique to the situation and your physical abilities. We could play “what if?” for hours and never answer every question. If you have bad knees and can’t kneel down behind that planter without pain, you might be hesitant to head in that direction. But consider this: If the bullets are coming your way, the pain of a gunshot wound will be far worse than knee pain as you try to crouch. I can’t answer every question about every scenario ... I’m just asking you to think about what you might do.

## **EFFECTIVELY USING COVER**

There is no doubt about it: When bullets start flying, you will very likely be terrified. Don’t let that fear keep you from thinking clearly. That’s why we address these topics before we are terrified. You need to think about what you will do; you need to train for several alternatives before you are in a deadly situation. This is especially true when it comes to effectively using cover. When



› **Train to limit how much of your body is exposed when “rolling” out from behind your cover.**

the adrenaline kicks in and you realize bullets are flying, you are very likely going to want to get as close to your piece of cover as possible. Don't do it. Good cover is good cover, and getting closer to it doesn't make it any better.

If you press your body tightly up against your cover, you limit your vision and your ability to move. You also run the risk of being injured by fragments of the cover that will be flying around when the cover stops the bullets.

The first rule of using cover effectively is to not crowd the cover. If you are using something like a vehicle, a wall, a tree or a pillar, you should be back from the cover about 3 to 6 feet. This allows you a good field of view and keeps you from being struck by flying debris. The goal is, of course, to keep as much of your body shielded as possible. To the extent that you can, conform to your cover. Any part of you that is sticking out could be struck by gunfire; refer to the first rule of winning a gunfight at the top of this piece. Conforming to cover is a perfect segue to the rules for shooting around your cover. Clearly, you must emerge from cover to get a shot at your attacker. The goal is to limit your exposure to incoming fire while

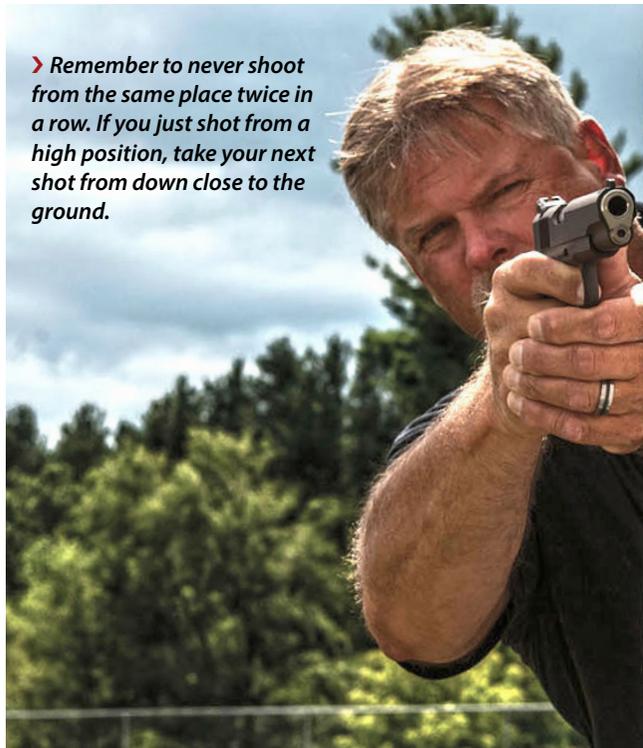
maximizing your ability to see and engage your target. We do this by “rolling” out.

Rolling out is likely not the most accurate descriptor for emerging from cover to take a shot, but it is the term commonly used in law enforcement training and I will explain that training here. Assuming you are a right-handed shooter and you are shooting around the right side of a tall vertical barricade, like the corner of a wall, you should be back 3 to 6 feet from the cover. Your feet should be a bit less than shoulder-width apart. Your right foot should be forward of your left foot and you should acquire your preferred two-handed grip on your firearm. Now “roll” forward with a slight lean to your right. Keep your feet, legs and hips behind the cover. All that should appear around the cover is your firearm and only as much of your head as is required for you to establish a good sight picture. Take the shot (or shots) and return to cover.

You can also do this from a kneeling position. Simply drop down on your left knee and roll forward to emerge from the cover and take the shot. This can be difficult for those with bad knees, so practice before you are forced to try it in battle. This system allows for you to maintain a

stable shooting platform but still keep the majority of your body behind cover. Of course, you might have to reposition and change your angle to get a good shot. To make it work for the other side of the barrier, you will need to reverse your foot position. If you can shoot with your non-dominant hand, you should try that. If you can't, you might end up being forced to expose a little more of your body in order to get a good sight picture. If you have to ... well, you have to. But remember: You should only expose the minimum. Anything you stick out there could be shot off.

Standard law enforcement training demands that you never, ever, emerge from cover in the same place twice in a row. That is, if you are standing and you roll out to take a shot, you should kneel for your next shot. And maybe go prone for your third shot. Then return to standing. The goal is to ensure that your attacker can't predict where you will pop out next. Now, this works effectively on a static range with perfect training barriers, but the real world might throw some other problems your way. Adapt. Try to come out in different locations if you can, but if you physically can't, you'll have to do the best you can with what you have where you are.



➤ *Remember to never shoot from the same place twice in a row. If you just shot from a high position, take your next shot from down close to the ground.*



## WHAT IF ... ?

The description above is a fine example of using cover if the cover is perfect, the footing is perfect and you are working on a training range that allows you to shoot around all sides of a barricade. Will everything be perfect in a gunfight? Almost never. You'll need to adapt to your surroundings. Apply the basic rules of staying back from the cover, using the angles to your advantage and only exposing the smallest amount of your body to your attacker as possible.

Aside from that, you need to adapt to your cover. You also need to be constantly looking to see if better cover is available. If you are caught on the street and all you have for cover is a fire hydrant, I suggest you get small and use that hydrant as best you can while you look for something better. If all you have is a curb, prone out, return fire if you can and look for better cover.

If you are physically unable to go prone or squat down behind a hydrant, you need to immediately abandon those ideas and get moving. You need to understand your physical limitations and know that any training or any suggestions you get must be contextualized to your physical abilities. If you can bend, squat or lay down, well then, get out of the way. Movement is not as good as cover, but it is better than nothing. Don't wait to move; rather, move while you are assessing your options. A gunfight is a dynamic event; do all you can to make yourself a difficult target.

## ONE LAST THING: KEEP THINKING!

Self-defense is a thinking person's game. Yes, a deadly event will be terrifying, but you have a better chance of getting through it alive if you keep your head.

During a training seminar, I watched a video I wish I could find now. It was a gunfight caught on the dashboard camera of a police car. The officer and the criminal were on opposite sides of a 4-foot-tall chain link fence equipped with those plastic privacy slats. The criminal ducked behind the fence and quickly popped up, firing two shots. The officer moved to the rear of the vehicle, then tried to time his shots to catch the shooter as he popped up to fire. After about three attempts, the officer realized his target was hiding behind plastic slats. He then fired through the fence, hitting the assailant and ending the fight.

Did the officer violate one of the cardinal safety rules because he could not clearly see his target? Technically, yes, but the overriding safety concern allowed for his actions. More importantly, that officer knew the difference between cover and concealment and used that knowledge to his advantage.

There is no way to define all of the options you might face when it comes to employing cover and concealment. Learn the basics and adapt them to your situations. Play the "what if?" game. It could save your life.



# **GAIN CONFIDENCE, PREPAREDNESS & PEACE OF MIND**

*WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP TO THE  
U.S. CONCEALED CARRY ASSOCIATION*

[www.USCCA.com](http://www.USCCA.com)  
1-877-677-1919

