



# How to Deal with Violent or Aggressive Behaviour in Public



**POLIZEI**  
BERLIN

Do you occasionally feel unsafe in public spaces? Do you sometimes feel afraid walking through the city by yourself?



Fear is natural and our instinct is a great inner compass. Even though our fear in public spaces is often unfounded, it's good to be prepared for difficult situations that may arise. This quick guide is based on police experience and provides information on how to deal with conflict situations in public spaces. It provides tips on how to diffuse hostile situations without resorting to physical violence or weapons.

## How to Avoid Dangerous Situations:

- **Stay Alert!**

Pay attention to your surroundings; don't let yourself get distracted; trust your intuition if something feels wrong. Ask yourself: Are you in an unsettling situation? Does someone's behaviour seem aggressive? Does it feel like a person's actions are violating boundaries? Recognising early warning signs means you can take action in time.

- **Stay Clear of Danger!**

Cross to the other side of the street; change carriages or compartments. Keep a safe distance to avoid injury (at least 2 metres to avoid blows and kicks). The sooner you act, the easier it is to avoid a dangerous situation.



- **Do Not to React to Provocation!**

Insults often lead to physical confrontation. If you are trying to resolve a hostile situation, don't retaliate. Ignore verbal attacks. Set a neutral boundary (e.g., „I don't want to talk right now.“) Stay calm; don't get drawn into someone's hostile communication by arguing back.

- **Walk away!**

Keep at a distance; try joining up with bystanders who seem trustworthy. Find a safe place (e.g. kiosk, restaurant, petrol station).

- **Alert Others!**

Raise your voice, shout loudly. Alert bystanders to your situation. If necessary, yell and describe what is happening. Address the offender in a way that makes it clear you do not know the person. Use language that is formal and conveys distance.

- **Ask for Help!**

Address bystanders directly, e.g.: „You in the blue shirt, call the police!“ Alert train staff or ask others to do so. In trams, U- and S-Bahn trains, pull the emergency lever. In stations, activate the emergency call box by pressing the button.

- **If you are in danger, always call the police emergency number 110.**





## Help Others with Safety in Mind

### • Anyone Can Help!

If you witness a hostile situation in public, do your best to help. Do not put yourself in danger!

### • Keep an Eye on the Situation!

Observe the conflict situation carefully. Keep a safe distance to avoid kicks, blows or further injury. Memorize the perpetrator's characteristics (e.g. appearance, clothing, language).

### • Take Action!

Trust your instincts if someone is acting aggressively or intrusively in public. Actively help a person being subjected to such behaviour.

Unsure? If in doubt, ask the person directly whether they need help.

### Always respond by de-escalating the situation. Never use weapons.

You can:

- Join forces with other people around; assist the victim as a group
- Request help from other bystanders
- Directly address the victim („Can I help you?“)
- Call for help!
  - Call the police emergency number: 110
  - On public transport: Emergency brake
  - In railway stations: Emergency call box
  - On the S-Bahn: Passenger assistance intercom



## Get the Victim out of the Situation!

If you see someone in an uncomfortable or even dangerous situation, make every possible effort to get them out of the immediate situation. If possible, join up with other bystanders. Only address the victim. (I.e. “Come, join us!” Hold out your hand to emphasize.) Ignore verbal attacks by the hostile person.



## Let Offender Get Away

The primary aim of helping someone in a hostile situation is to prevent further escalation or even violent offences.

After alerting the police, try to get the offender to flee the scene by shouting from a safe distance: „Stop! The police are on the way!“ (If circumstances allow, do so together with other bystanders.)

**Never block the offender's path - you could be injured.**



## Help the Victim

Help the victim by:

- Providing first aid
- Staying at the scene until the police arrive
- Pressing charges
- Testifying as a witness

The Berlin Police offer a free course on this topic: „Dealing with aggression and violence in public spaces“ (only available in German). Dates can be found on this website:



[www.berlin.de/  
polizei/aufgaben/  
praevention/  
gewalt/  
artikel.148189.php](http://www.berlin.de/polizei/aufgaben/praevention/gewalt/artikel.148189.php)

## Dealing with Public Sexual Harassment or Sexual Assault

Non-consensual sexualized touching of a person is a criminal offence and includes e.g. groping or forcible kissing. Especially in public, the offender may or may not exploit an element of surprise to startle the victim.

Especially in crowds or other situations where you cannot immediately remove yourself physically, it is helpful to draw attention to the situation and set a clear boundary. For example, you can make eye contact with the offender and shout: „Don't touch me!“ If it's unclear who harassed or assaulted you, ask loudly: „Who just touched me?“ and demand, „Stop!“

Another option is to approach bystanders and explain what just happened to you. Ask for help!

Report the incident to the police as soon as possible so that any evidence and video footage can be secured. Even if you cannot report the offence immediately, giving a statement later is always sensible. It can help prevent further offences.

Further information on this topic can be found on this website:



[www.berlin.de/  
polizei/dienststellen/  
landeskriminalamt/  
lka-1/  
artikel.148804.php](http://www.berlin.de/polizei/dienststellen/landeskriminalamt/lka-1/artikel.148804.php)

## In the Event of Robbery

Your health and life are more important than any valuables!

If you're being mugged, you should cooperate and hand over your valuables. – Especially if the offender is armed or threatens you with physical violence!

**Weapons are always a threat to life.**

**Remember:  
Being armed for self-defence is  
always dangerous!**

The police strongly advise against carrying weapons of any kind. Weapons such as knives, pepper spray and gas pistols should not be carried for self-defence.

They provide a false sense of security. Carrying a weapon may encourage you to take unnecessary risks in an encounter with a hostile person; it may cause you to neglect safer options.

The use of any form of weapon can quickly escalate a situation and may lead to severe injury. It also makes it difficult for the police or anyone helping to understand who is the perpetrator and who is the victim.

This brochure describes effective alternatives for dealing with hostile situations without carrying a weapon.

For more information on the topic of “No weapons for Self Defence”, click here:



[www.berlin.de/  
polizei/aufgaben/  
praevention/gewalt/  
artikel.780097.php](http://www.berlin.de/polizei/aufgaben/praevention/gewalt/artikel.780097.php)

Check the following websites for more information about the topics in this brochure:

- [www.berlin.de/polizei/  
aufgaben/praevention/gewalt/](http://www.berlin.de/polizei/aufgaben/praevention/gewalt/)
- [www.berlin.de/lb/lkbgg](http://www.berlin.de/lb/lkbgg)
- [www.aktion-tu-was.de](http://www.aktion-tu-was.de)
- [www.polizei-beratung.de/  
themen-und-tipps/gewalt/](http://www.polizei-beratung.de/themen-und-tipps/gewalt/)
- [www.polizeifuerdich.de](http://www.polizeifuerdich.de)
- [www.zivile-helden.de](http://www.zivile-helden.de)

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