



## PERSONAL SAFETY PART 1

### GAINING CONFIDENCE

**DISCLAIMER:** *These tips are written from a non-professional viewpoint, as a woman who travels solo, and based on what has worked for me. Some are what other people have told me worked for them. Remember – everybody is different. You need to work out what will work for you.*

The questions I always get asked when I say I'm travelling alone is "aren't you scared", or "isn't that dangerous". Followed by "what will you do if something goes wrong".

Women are *always* on high alert regarding personal safety. Regardless of whether they're travelling, walking the streets at home, or even just sitting in their own house.

Allaying women's fears is often a matter of building general confidence rather than turning yourself into a martial arts expert or building a high-security fortress.

This chapter is designed to give you tips to help you build confidence, to stop being afraid just because you've been told it's dangerous.

### *Start slow and build confidence*

Just about everything is scary the first time you do it. But the more you do it, the easier it gets. Travelling and camping solo are no different.

Start simple, by doing smaller things that gradually build your confidence.

Practice by going away for a weekend. Go with a friend. Stay at a caravan park before you go out and bush camp. But each time you go away do something different. Stay away longer, go further away, go to a completely new place, go on your own. Build your confidence one step at a time.

You can also do this at home too. If you go for a daily walk, take a different route or walk in a different area. Go to a café or restaurant by yourself and sit and watch what's going on around you rather than bury yourself in a book. Smile at people and say hello when you walk past them on the street. They won't all respond but you'd be surprised by how many will. You might even make new friends at home. This will also help you to meet people while you're travelling.

### *Don't act like a victim*

One of the biggest things you can do to improve your personal safety (apart from becoming a martial arts expert) is to not act like a victim.

All those things you've been told all your life about not making a fuss, about being unobtrusive, about not being loud – ignore them. They mark you out as somebody who won't fight back, an easy mark.

DO NOT act like a victim. Don't sneak into campsites, don't avoid making eye contact or saying hello. Don't hunch over and try to make yourself invisible. In fact you need to do the opposite.

Stand straight and tall, walk proudly, look people in the eye and say hello. Look around you as you walk rather than at the ground in front of you. If you appear confident, you are less likely to be marked out as a potential victim.

It's hard to show confidence when you don't feel confident. But, like with a lot of things, the more you practice the better you get at it. Use the tips above to help get started.

Fake it until you make it.

### *Meet other people*

Just about everywhere you go there will be other people there, but mostly travelling in pairs or groups. So how to you meet them?

Simple. Also the hardest thing some people ever have to do. Walk up to them and say hello.

Go for a walk around wherever you're camping or staying, nod and say hello to people who are about. Comment on the weather or the beauty of the place, or their dog. Something light and easy. If they mumble or avoid making eye contact give them a miss. If they start chatting, then continue the conversation, or ask if you can join them. Say something like "I was just going to pour myself a glass of wine, do you mind if I bring it over and join you?"

We often don't do this because we're afraid of being rejected. The reality is that you probably will get people who don't want to talk to you. That's their prerogative. It's not personal so don't take it personally. And if it is personal – well you really don't want to talk with them anyway. Shrug your shoulders, lift your chin, and move on.

Most people out on the road are happy to have company. They're travelling, they're happy and not stressed, they have time, they like to talk.

"But what would I talk about?" I hear you say. You will be surprised about how easily the conversation flows if you start with something they're interested in. Their dog, where they've come from, where they're going to, how do they like their caravan, what was their favourite experience. Any of those topics will start a conversation that could go on all night.

If there's a communal campfire go and sit by it. Or cook in the camp kitchen.

If there's a group of kids walking towards you, don't shrink. Smile at them and say hello. They'll probably say hello back. And you've just identified yourself as "that nice lady" if they do get a bit boisterous later.

Meeting the people around you improves how you feel about a place, and how you feel about your own safety. It also means if you scream in the middle of the night they're more likely to come running to your rescue because now they know you.

### **Keep in touch with people at home**

If somebody knows where you are you feel less alone. Use social media to show off your adventures and maintain that link to home. It also helps to feel safer if people at home know where you are. Join a facebook group(s) of women who travel or who have similar interests (see below).

[Set up a communications plan](#) with somebody at home so that you're never really out of touch. [more on how to do a communications plan is coming]

### **Find a support group**

Far from being 'our own worst enemies' other women travelling are the best support group you will get.

There are a number of facebook groups for women travellers where you can go for advice, to have a chat, to unload, or even to arrange to meet other women in the area. You don't necessarily have to be travelling now, and reading and talking with other women about their travels can help build your confidence.

Just a few of these are:

- Women caravanning, camping, and travelling solo in Australia
- Solo women campers meet ups
- Adventurous women
- Chicks camping crew

One of the great things about these groups is they are (generally) non-judgmental. No question is considered stupid. If you don't know how to change a tyre or if something has happened that you don't know how to deal with, somebody will be happy to give you some tips.

With all the people in these groups and the number of them out travelling at any time, the odds are good that you'll run into one of them somewhere.

### **Learn to say 'fuck'**

Most people don't expect old women to swear (and hey – let's face it, any woman over 40 is old to a lot of people). Swearing does make you sound a lot tougher and more confident – less like a victim. Even if you don't normally swear, practice saying it - "fuck off". And louder "FUCK OFF".

You don't have to say it all the time, but believe me, it helps in some situations.

### ***Stop being so polite***

How many times have we all been trapped in a situation where somebody (usually a bloke) comes over for a chat and just won't leave. Who keeps injecting sexual innuendo into the conversation, and drops hints about 'sleeping arrangements'.

You do not owe these people anything. Not your time. Not your conversation. Not your smile. Not your good manners.

No, is another word we don't use enough as women "No, I don't want to talk to you", "No, I'm not interested in listening to you", "No, no, no". Stop trying to find a polite or gentle way to say no, and say it outright. Practice saying it. "No".

If that doesn't work, tell them to fuck off too. They might get upset, but they will go away.

### ***Tip: Not all men have the skills and confidence you think they do***

Men aren't born with mechanical knowledge. They don't automatically know how to reverse a van into a camping spot. Some never learn either. Many men lack confidence meeting or talking with new people. They get lonely.

The difference is – nobody tells them they can't do anything because of it.

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## **Some dos and don'ts**

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DO learn to say "fuck off" and say it frequently. And loudly. Ditto "no". Say it like you mean it.

DO join online groups of like-minded women. Other women are a great support if you have problems or worries while on the road. You might even be able to meet up with some while you're travelling.

DO work out those things that *are* more likely to happen and put in place strategies to manage them, and DON'T worry about those things that aren't.

DO NOT act like a victim. Stand straight and tall

DO NOT let fear stop you. Use your fear to push yourself to try new things.