

SECURITY MATTERS

Security Matters is one of a series of 5 brochures for people working in the sex industry. The others cover *Health, Law, Money, and Dancing Matters*.

Security Matters covers:

- ★ Some of the most common problems that came up in interviews with workers, and
- ★ Tips for how to deal with them.

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Information in the brochures comes from research conducted with escorts, masseuses, street workers, dancers, and doms in Toronto and Montreal from 2001 to 2003. Although the information in this brochure largely reflects the experiences of women, it may also be useful to men or TS/TG workers. **Select the tips that work best for you or modify them to meet your needs.**

PREPARING FOR WORK

Sex workers report that being physically and emotionally prepared for work can increase self-confidence and keep you more secure on the job. Choose what works for you.

- Establish personal limits for when and where you work, services provided, and prices charged. Define them, rehearse them, and revisit them from time to time.
- Carry a *safety-comfort kit* (condoms, gloves, finger cots, lubricant, non-alcohol-based wipes, fabric or liquid bandages, disinfectant, baby-powder, and anti-bacterial gel).
- Carry items that can be used in dangerous situations (e.g., a whistle, aerosol hair spray, long keys, a flashlight). Pepper spray or stun guns are illegal and may be turned against you.
- Dress with personal security in mind (e.g., avoid long scarves, neck chains, and long purse straps).
- Carry a cell phone with an emergency number on speed dial. When a cell phone isn't available, quarters or a telephone card give you quick access to a phone. **911 calls are free on pay phones.**
- Leave valuables at home.
- Take a self-defence course that fits your needs.
- Check out the bad date list in your area on a regular basis.
- Develop strategies for staying alert and in control if you use drugs or alcohol while working. Share your strategies with others.

SECURING YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

While you may not be able to choose a work location that is entirely safe, there are strategies you can use to make it safer. Decide which work best for you:

- Create solidarity with fellow workers by sharing information about clients, police, and what's been happening in the area.
- Be watchful of police activity regarding "street sweeps" when selecting a work place. Be extra alert when the seasons change and before special events when such sweeps are most likely to occur.
- Since prices and services vary by site and between sex workers, work in locations that best fit your personal limits.
- Dispose of used condoms, needles, and broken glass appropriately.

When working on-street:

- Work in a well lit, populated area. While this can discourage bad dates, it may lead to unwanted attention from police, neighbours etc. Use your own best judgement.
- Get to know the locations of restaurants and businesses that are open and friendly (e.g., 24-hour stores, donut shops, gas stations).
- Plan easy exit routes.
- Check for telephone booths.
- Arrange with co-workers to note the license plates of cars you get into.
- Check the backseat of all cars before you get in.
- Check for door handles and lock release buttons when the car door opens and the light comes on.
- Avoid the back seat of a two-door car.
- Avoid cars with tinted windows and closed cargo vans.
- Be extra cautious if there is more than one person in a car.
- When conducting business in a car, select a location where people pass by occasionally (not exposed enough for them to see what's happening, but close enough so they can hear if you need help).
- When going to a hotel with a client, tell a co-worker where you're going and how long you'll be gone, or phone a friend or your answering machine when you get to the room to leave the phone number, address and room number. Be sure your client is aware that the call has been made.
- Place your clothes and wallet/purse in the same place to make a speedy exit possible.
- If using the same hotel or tourist room, develop good relations with the staff who may be helpful in an emergency.
- Learn about the legal issues that apply to you (see *Law Matters*).

When working off-street:

- Check that any agency you work for screens its clients to your satisfaction.
- Work where you feel safest (e.g., working from home can make you feel stronger and more in control; using a "working apartment" for in-

- calls or doing out-calls can help separate your private and work life, and avoid stalkers).
- Decide whether you feel secure taking in-calls when your neighbours are home. Some neighbours can be helpful in an emergency; others can cause problems with your landlord or police.
- Consider alternatives to in-calls, such as developing a comprehensive list of places around town (tourist rooms, hotels, motels, saunas, etc.) where you can meet clients.
- Learn about the legal issues if your preference is for in-calls (see *Law Matters*).
- Work out a personal screening strategy when talking with customers on the phone:
 - Using cell and pay phones may be considered a public space (see *Law Matters*).
 - Mentioning money and services over the phone is legally risky, but it is also unsafe to meet clients without finalizing details.
 - If making out-calls, get a call-back number and phone to make sure it is legitimate.
 - Find out how others screen calls. Share your strategies with others.
- Double-check the destination with the agency driver before getting into the car when on an out-call.
- Make sure your client is alone when you enter the hotel room or home. Plan an exit route.
- Make sure someone knows where you are. Call your agency when you arrive and when you leave. If you work independently, call a friend or your answering machine and leave the phone number, address, and room number. Be sure your client is aware of the call.
- Place your clothes and wallet/purse in the same place to make a speedy exit possible.
- **Be alert!** You may be filmed without your knowledge.

What to watch for: Web cameras on computers, a red light, an art piece that doesn't fit, an oddly placed gym bag, or a client that tries to keep your activity in a very specific location.

What to do: If you are unsure about a certain object, put your clothes over it. If you detect a camera, don't argue; just get the tape and leave. When filming is done without your consent, there is no easily available legal protection at the moment.

DEALING WITH CLIENTS

When choosing clients:

- Talk to them in order to determine their state of mind and character.
- Show confidence when negotiating, stating your professional limits, and getting paid up front.
- Avoid clients who are rude, disrespectful, or who "act funny" (shifty, creepy, aggressive). They may cause trouble.
- Be wary of "party" situations where groups of people are drinking or using drugs.
- Keep an eye on your drink to avoid having it spiked when chatting with a client.
- Develop a regular client base. This can increase your personal, legal, and financial security.

When negotiating safer sex:

- Choose sexual positions that allow you to remain in control.
- Bring your own condoms.
- Check the date on the condom and that the seal is intact.
- Put the condom on your client and check to see that it stays in place, especially during withdrawal.
- Depending upon your assessment of the situation, insist on a condom or negotiate a lower risk activity when being pestered for sex without a condom.
- Be respectful, but don't trust clients who say they are safe. Not all are truthful or will know if they have an infection.
- Practice the lines and responses you use with clients. Do this with a friend. Practicing can help sharpen your negotiating skills and ability to respond well under pressure.

When a client continues to insist on unsafe sex:

- Learn techniques to put a condom on a client or simulate vaginal sex without him noticing. These techniques are difficult to learn and take practice. Talk to others who have used them before trying them yourself. These techniques may be responded to in a negative way if a client becomes aware of what you are doing.
- Talk him into a lower risk activity if he insists on vaginal sex without a condom.
- Tell him that you have diarrhoea if he insists on anal sex without a condom.
- Use a female condom.
- For more details on protecting yourself and your clients from STIs and HIV see *Health Matters*.

If a client turns violent:

- Take a deep breath; keep breathing.
- Talk to the client calmly and, if possible, leave the setting as quickly as you can.
- Try to stay calm; stay alert for the first opportunity to act. Each situation calls for a different response.
- If you can, let others (pedestrians, neighbours, hotel guests) know you are in trouble. Yell, use a whistle, or create a loud noise. Although safety is important, some sex workers have good reasons to avoid drawing attention to themselves. Make the decision that is right for you.
- Remember that your fear can make you strong. If you are being held, think about the parts of your body that are free (feet, legs, head) and use them to resist and fight back.
- If you are carrying a weapon, be aware that it may be turned against you.

- If you have taken a self-defence course, use what you learned.
- If you escape from a car, run away in the opposite direction the car is headed.

What to do following a violent incident:

- Get appropriate medical help if you have been injured.
- Talk to somebody; don't keep it all inside.
- Consider the pros and cons of pressing charges. Talk with someone you trust to help with this decision and to be with you if you decide to go to the police.
- Report the incident and the aggressor's description to your co-workers and the publishers of the bad date list, if there is one in your city.
- If there is a sex worker's organization in your area, contact them. They may be able to help if you want to press charges and often know which police officers have the best attitudes.

WHAT TO DO WHEN APPROACHED BY POLICE

- See *Law Matters*.

BETWEEN DATE TIPS

When you have downtime between dates use it to:

- Deposit your money somewhere safe (e.g., with a friend or in a bank machine).
- Stretch, take a sit-down break, massage your feet. If you have the chance, it can be refreshing to wash your feet or splash water on your face and the back of your neck, wrists and elbows.
- Eat a high-energy meal, or healthy snacks like power bars, dried fruit and nuts, meal replacement drinks.
- Check in with others working the same location for an update on the latest events.

OTHER SAFETY CONCERNS

If you want more information on the topics covered in this brochure or other safety issues, Stella, a Montreal organization run by and for sex workers, has excellent health and safety tips on their website in *The XXX Guide*. You can find it at: www.chezstella.org or by calling 514-285-8889.

Aussi disponible en français.
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