

Office of Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Fall 2015

Preventing Bad Things from Happening

“I just *knew* something was wrong.”

“I had a gut feeling.”

“I just felt like something bad was about to happen.”

However it is referenced – gut feeling, intuitiveness, premonition, or sixth sense - intuition is a very real phenomenon.

The Oxford Dictionary describes intuition as “the ability to understand something immediately, without the need for conscious reasoning.” In other words, you *just know*. In reality, however, it’s not as simple as *just knowing*. *Psychology Today* states, “We think of intuition as a magical phenomenon – but hunches are formed out of our past experiences and knowledge.” Your brain is subconsciously cataloging details and information all day long. And you may process and recall information in a time and manner not readily apparent to your conscious mind. Therein resides the basis for intuition.

Science Daily states, “...science has historically ridiculed the concept of intuition,” however, “researchers conclude that intuition is the brain drawing on past experiences and external cues to make a decision – but one that happens so fast the reaction is at a non-conscious level. All we’re aware of is a general feeling that something is right or wrong.”

Intuition is such a powerful and effective force that law enforcement practitioners often stake their lives on it.

“Typically, when you feel something is wrong, something is actually wrong. It’s an uneasy feeling about a person or situation,” says Sgt. John Schultz of the Wheeling Police Department. Sgt. Schultz has served on the police force for 20 years. He is a Prevention Resource Officer for public as well as Catholic schools in the Northern Panhandle.

Sgt. Tom Howard, also a 20-year veteran of the Wheeling Police Department, works with Sgt. Schultz as a Prevention Resource Officer in public and Catholic schools. “It’s a feeling ... something is telling you. It is that sixth sense of knowing something is not right,” Sgt. Howard adds.

And according to Sgt. Schultz and Sgt. Howard, it isn’t necessary to be a police officer to hone your intuition in an effort to prevent bad things from happening. In fact, it’s called raising situational awareness. Situational awareness is just that – being aware of your surroundings: the physical characteristics of the area, the people in the area, and what activities are happening in the area. **Anyone – even the average citizen - can develop situational awareness as a preventive measure.**

According to Sgt. Schultz and Sgt. Howard, there are four primary ways the average person can raise situational awareness and shore up intuition. When you practice these behaviors, you are more likely to notice suspicious circumstances when they arise.

1. **LOOK AROUND.** “A lot of people have tunnel vision,” Sgt. Howard says. “They are on auto-pilot. So many people have so much to do they don’t even realize what is going on around them.” With fall being back to school time, this advice is especially important for parents and teachers, but it actually applies to any environment. Stop and take a few minutes to look – really *look* – at your surroundings and engage your senses. For example, “Look for something that seems out of place,” Sgt. Howard says. “You see someone come into a basketball game and is standing by themselves and nobody is talking to them. Nobody knows who that person is. This person doesn’t fit in at all. That’s a red flag. It doesn’t necessarily mean they have done something wrong, but it may mean this is someone you should watch.” He continues, “Look for something that seems or is out of place. Does a person look different? Do you notice an odor that’s different? What do you hear? Engage your senses. Open your eyes.”

2. **LISTEN.** Most importantly, being a good listener entails not cutting off the speaker. “Be a good listener and pay attention to the speaker,” Sgt. Schultz says. “A kid will come into my office for one thing, and I find out three more just by being a good listener. Let the person talk.” On the flip side, he added, sometimes listening is part of engaging your senses and being aware of your environment in general and not being focused on one particular person. “You would be amazed what you hear from kids when they are talking to each other and don’t think you are paying attention to them,” he adds.
3. **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS.** “This is where prevention comes in,” Sgt. Schultz says. “Be approachable.” Getting to know the people in various environments can help a person recognize when something or someone is out of place or off kilter. Also, “you can learn more information and possibly prevent bad things from happening when you have good relationships and are approachable,” Sgt. Schultz says. “When you have good relationships, people will tell you things. And if you have information, you can help prevent things. Prevention is the best way.” Developing relationships is especially important for the parents of teens. “Get to know your kids’ friends,” Sgt. Schultz adds.
4. **BE INVOLVED.** “It doesn’t have to take hours and hours,” Sgt. Howard says. “It might just take a few minutes to be involved to raise awareness. Make time, even if it’s just a few minutes. Be involved for just a few minutes.” This includes paying attention to the people in your life, especially where teens and children are involved: who are their friends; what are they watching or listening to; when are they coming and going; where do they hang out; what are they looking at on the internet. “That’s not being a helicopter parent, that is prevention,” Sgt. Schultz says. “I don’t want my kid to be a victim. If I can eliminate some dangers, I’m going to. I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t do something preventive.” Sgt. Howard added that spending time as a family is crucial to being involved and raising awareness. “Remember, if you don’t spend time as a family now, you can’t ever get that time back,” he says.

Equally as important as raising situational awareness is acting on it, according to both officers. “Don’t be afraid to act,” Sgt. Schultz says. “Don’t be afraid to notify the proper people. You are not going to be punished if you notice something and report it and it turns out to be a false alarm.”

Sgt. Howard added that acting on instinct to prevent a crime does not necessarily mean physical involvement or heroics for most average citizens. “Acting on something doesn’t mean you have to physically do something. It can just mean reporting something. Now you see a pattern of behavior, and it’s just an act of saying something to someone ... just a very simple thing of saying, ‘I saw this’ or ‘I noticed this.’”

In fact, both officers note that most situations can be investigated and/or resolved using dialogue, with everyone remaining none the wiser that anything was ever even reported as suspicious. However, if a situation is combative or physical, it’s best to let law enforcement handle it. “If you do find yourself in a confrontational circumstance, don’t escalate the situation,” Sgt. Schultz said. “Don’t be confrontational back. Someone who is very agitated - that’s a red flag. Don’t escalate it, and let the professionals handle it.”

Both officers explained that today’s children and teens especially face issues far beyond their levels of maturity.

“There are sexual predators on line,” Sgt. Schultz said. “There are cell phones. You’ve got social media now. You’ve got bullying. There are shootings at schools. Drugs are everywhere.” Those entrusted with the care of children and teens must remain vigilant. “Don’t be in denial,” Sgt. Schultz advises. “Don’t think just because you are in a Catholic environment that it can’t happen here. It’s everywhere.”

Why Is There An Office Of Safe Environment?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people from sex abuse. The “*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*” was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sex abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons from the 1950s through the 1990s. The USCCB established an **Office of Child and Youth Protection** to oversee the application of the Charter’s principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards.

Each year, Dioceses in the United States are audited by the USCCB for compliance. The results of these audits are published in an annual public report. The most recent report, as well as other reports related to this subject, may be found

on the USCCB's web site: www.usccb.org › at the bottom of the page, click on "Child and Youth Protection" › then down the left side of the page, click on "Reports and Research".

The following language and statistics are from the USCCB's web site under the "Audit" section regarding Safe Environment programs nationwide and their impact on the Catholic Church in the United States:

"Faced with the crisis of child sexual abuse by clerics that dramatically came to light in 2002, the church set up an aggressive safe environment program that is the envy of other organizations that work with children. From the annual audits, we can say the Catholic Church in the United States:

- **Trained more than 2.1 million clergy, employees, and volunteers in parishes in how to create safe environments and prevent child sexual abuse.**
- **Prepared more than 5.2 million children to recognize abuse and protect themselves.**
- **Ran background checks on more the 1,887,000 volunteers and employees, 166,000 educators, 52,000 clerics and 6,000 candidates for ordination."**

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston has a Process Administrator (Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati) for the Office of Safe Environment and a full-time Office of Safe Environment Coordinator (Sharon Goudy) to help ensure the Diocese's commitment to its children and young people and compliance with the Diocese's Safe Environment Policy. In addition, at the local level, each parish, school, or organization appoints a local-level coordinator to carry out the Safe Environment process.

Reporting

West Virginia Adult / Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop's designees at: **304.233.0880 or 1.888.434.6237:**

- Sr. Ellen F. Dunn, O.P., ext. 264
- Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263
- Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, V.G., ext. 267
- Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, STD, V.E., ext. 270

You may also fill out and return a confidential **Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor** by printing one from the Diocese's web site at www.dwc.org, then clicking Diocese › Offices › Office of Safe Environment › Download Files and Forms or by calling 304.230.1504 to request a form via U.S. mail from the Office of Safe Environment.

The Three Components of Compliance for the Office of Safe Environment

The Safe Environment Program by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following three components:

- ✓ Background Check
- ✓ Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children (Summer 2014)
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components (Background Check, Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children, and Awareness Training for Adults – VIRTUS) are mandated by the Diocese for persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer directly or indirectly with children. A person is considered in compliance with the Diocese's Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components. Every year, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - as well as all other dioceses in the United States - is audited by the USCCB for compliance with its "*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.*"

**Deepest thanks to all who have roles in helping to make the
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston safe!**