

Problem Determination Exercises

Determining whether you have a problem isn't always easy, especially if you're not sure who the problem is. But there is a special ops and spy tradecraft technique called surveillance detection that can reveal whether or not you're being targeted or followed. While clandestine surveillance detection is typically used for more complicated objectives, with the intent not to alert the opposition to your own cognizance, the foundation and basics remain the same. Surveillance detection is accomplished by conducting a surveillance detection route. As with all skills, one becomes better with expert instruction and practice, so while you likely won't be able to build in a twenty-second gap between yourself and a tail in order to accomplish a covert drop or pickup, you will be able to determine the interest of common criminals and predators. Plus, you'll be able to impress your friends with your newfound skills and ability to throw around the term "SDR."

Listed here are tips to determine tails and also a few techniques to lose them. These are designed for use when walking along large metropolitan streets or in shopping centers where crowds are big enough to make stalkers more difficult to spot.

How to Conduct a Personal SDR

- Stop regularly, look around, high and low as well as left and right.
Include stops at random times or locations. Says Victoria, "Be a head bobbler and curious." Stop, fix your shoe, or pretend to. Sit down.
This gives you time to mentally breathe and forces anyone following you to stop as well—making them more noticeable.

- Be erratic (changing course where it doesn't make sense or doubling back, for example). This forces stalkers to close the gap so they don't lose you. The more predictable you are, the farther back a tail can remain, making it more difficult for you to identify them.
- Predators, human or chimp, tend to track from behind. When arriving at intersections, don't immediately look in the direction you're headed. First look in the direction you've just come from, then left and right, before turning your attention back to your direction of travel.
- Cross a street. Better still, jaywalk, and if it's a larger street or—best of all—a split street with a center median, your tail will be more exposed.
- Watch for people that catch your eye. If you notice them, make a mental note of something that distinguishes them, to make them easy to remember. Things like “bad comb-over guy” or “should have been a bag lady based on fashion” or “punk kid with too many piercings.” If you are moving and see them more than twice, that's a strong indicator.
- A common mistake is to fixate on your destination or anything you're engaged in, like a transaction, particularly ATMs (for obvious reasons). This can be a difficult habit to overcome and even professionals lapse, including me. However, if you're at an ATM and

being followed by a criminal, they almost certainly will keep you under observation, and by merely looking around, you can “out” your tail.

- When seated indoors or walking where windows are part of your landscape, use both windows and mirrors to see what’s around. Mirrors are particularly helpful in restaurants where they’re used to create the illusion of greater space or a more open environment, and you should always notice them. The more you practice window “washing” (cleaning scum from your view), the better you’ll become. Using windowpanes angled at 90 degrees to each other and that allow you to see at angles works particularly well. Also, two windows, or a window and a mirror, that face each other provide a cunning means to look in the direction you expect to see someone approaching from when you don’t want to be looking directly at them (the mirror or window into which you’re peering will be offset from the final, third angle and therefore it won’t appear that you’re looking directly at the person). Selecting restaurants with mirrors is a common clandestine trick. Choosing your seat and spot in a restaurant or where to stop on the street becomes an art in and of itself. The old adage of never having your back to an entrance or window isn’t, therefore, always the law. You may choose a vantage point that puts your back to entrances. If you want to be “spy tricky,” use your wine glass or other glass objects—even ones on your

neighbor's table can sometimes be of use, though minimally—to see behind you. The windows-and-mirrors game is fun to experiment with, and I encourage you to make a habit of it.

Means to Lose or Counter a Creeper When You've Got One

- In stores or restaurants, approach an employee and tell them, “There’s a creep following me. Can I use your back door to lose them?” If it’s a lone creeper and you’re female, visit a female-centric store if possible. Baby Gaps and Victoria’s Secrets work well. A lone male, especially one that’s following you for nefarious purposes, will not only stand out but be uncomfortable. That alone will buy you breathing space and change a “hasty” situation to a “deliberate” one, a desirable transition (see next chapter, “Develop a Plan”).
- If in an area with an escalator, take it. Up is best because it gives you the high ground for observation, but either way it forces a pursuer into a long and confined channel that you can easily observe. Another tactic is to go up, then straight down. If you cross, you’ll be able to get a much better view of them. Avoid elevators to change floors. Stairs work almost as well except when doubling back, as you’d be face-to-face without the benefit of a barrier.
- This brings up the subject of eye contact. If you think they’re trying to make you a target, letting them know you know they’re there is a good countermeasure. A direct look in the eye is better than a furtive

glance over a shoulder, because that is displaying prey animal behavior and you want them to know you're a predator too. "It's always an iffy proposition," says Victoria. "If they're trying to be sneaky, eye contact can work because they'll be surprised. But you don't want to encourage them." My recommendation is if you make eye contact and if something passes between you and the creep, accompany your look with a nonverbal gesture making clear your intention and awareness. A shake of the head or "no no" finger gesture work well.

- I don't recommend verbal contact or confrontations and certainly not in poorly lit or isolated locations. However, if you're pushed into a face-to-face beyond your control, use a direct "Stop following me" or "Did you need something?" Also, dialing your phone and getting anyone while pretending it's your husband, wife, boyfriend, bodyguard, whatever and saying into the phone as they pick up, "There's a creep here bothering me," is perfect. Calling the police in front of him is even better. As soon as the operator answers with "9-1-1, what's your emergency?" simply tell them, "There's a man following me and he's right here, I'm at _____." He'll get that message without ambiguity. And if he calls you a bitch? Just smile. Better that than a creeping son-of-a-bitch stalker.
- Footwear is an important consideration, especially for females. Victoria has a strong opinion and remedy if you're a member of the

Jimmy Choo shoe crew. As with phones, she explained to me, “You will never be able to tell a woman not to wear her ‘hot’ shoes. It’ll never happen, but they’re a big differentiator in escaping. The solution is to take them off. Because bare feet are better than stilettos.” In almost any situation, including big cities, short of Chicago in January, you’re better off barefoot when you need to “beat feet.”

- Places to be avoided both for conducting an SDR and as a lone individual are parking structure stairwells, and restrooms down long corridors (such as in shopping malls) or in poorly lit environments. And dead ends are right out.