

# The Antidote to Fears of Terrorist Acts: Survivor Personality Skills

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Adapted from *The Survivor Personality: Why Some People Are Stronger, Smarter, and More Skillful at Handling Life's Difficulties...and How You Can Be, Too*, (Berkeley/Perigee Books, 1996)

Attorney General John Ashcroft is urging Americans to have a heightened sense of awareness of their surroundings, be vigilant, and while attentive to the threats, not yield to fear.

Years of research into the inner nature of people made stronger by extreme adversity has identified the core skills that show how to reduce your chances of getting harmed by terrorist acts, help you avoid feeling intimidated, and increase your confidence that you can cope with dangerous situations if they occur.

## In potentially dangerous situations:

- ◆ Be curious about what is going on around you.
- ◆ Observe others in a quiet, non-judgmental way.
- ◆ Use your intuition and monitor your feelings.
- ◆ Adapt quickly. Be very flexible. The most important skill for surviving is the ability to adapt quickly to unexpected developments.
- ◆ Be playful. Laughing reduces tension, improves your problem solving skills, and increases your ability to take effective action.
- ◆ Anticipate problems. Look at the bad things that could happen in order to avoid them or to handle them if they do occur.

## If you are caught in a dangerous situation:

- ◆ Calm yourself. Telling yourself to “relax” or “stay calm” is a valuable survivor reflex.
- ◆ Rapidly read the new reality. Quickly size up what is happening.
- ◆ Focus on the problem, not your distress.
- ◆ Be self-reliant. If no one in authority is telling people what to do, figure out your best course of action and take it.

## You increase your ability to survive future dangerous situations when you:

- ◆ Learn good lessons from bad experiences.
- ◆ Develop healthy self-esteem. A strong, positive identity makes you less vulnerable to dangerous people, and lets you understand them better.
- ◆ Enjoy your life. Frequent positive feelings of enjoyment, appreciation, affection and satisfaction will strengthen you and expand your mental abilities for dealing with threats.
- ◆ Find the gifts in rough experiences.
- ◆ Become highly resilient. Ask “How can I interact with this so that things turn out well for everyone?”

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