

## Whistles and Alarms: Pros & Cons

by Susan Bartelstone, Crime Prevention Specialist

*Let out a fierce, bloodcurdling "Warrior Yell" if you sense danger. I've heard thousands of crime-stopping success stories using this tactic.*

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Yelling directly into someone's ear (if you've been grabbed, the ear will be close by) has the same effect as blowing a whistle into it.

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*Don't yell "Help." People tend to freeze when they hear this and are unclear what to do.*

Yell "Get away from me!" or "Call the Police, I'm being attacked!" which tells listeners that you're in danger while projecting a non-victim, crime-stopping attitude.

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*No absolutes exist in crime scenarios and no advice can address every variable. Evaluate each situation individually and only respond in the way you judge will ensure your safety or survival. Sometimes nothing can be done to prevent an undesirable outcome.*

**AN EMAIL I RECEIVED:** Dear Susan, I'm a 74-year-old grandmother. The other day at my Senior Center, a Police Officer came and gave a lecture about personal safety. At the end of the lecture, he handed out a whistle to everyone in the audience and told us to always carry it and blow on it if we got into trouble. I like the idea of carrying something to protect myself, but I have my doubts about how effective a whistle would be. What do you think?

### Whistling Dixie in NY

**Dear Whistling:** Portable noise-making devices like whistles (and personal alarms) are highly touted by the police because they're legal and easy to use, especially for older people to whom they're routinely given (the most vulnerable of targets because of their real or perceived frailty).

#### The Pros:

- Attracting attention to your plight **IS** a good tactic (hopefully someone will be around to offer help).
- Taking action will keep you from freezing in fear and panic.
- **Whistles can be weapons.** Blowing a whistle loudly into an assailant's ear is even more effective than merely trying to summon aid with it. This can break the eardrum—which causes pain, loss of balance and possibly even unconsciousness—weakening or disabling your assailant enough to enable you to escape.

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*Carrying pepper spray is another good option.*

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#### The Cons:

- It's dangerous to rely on someone else to come to your aid. Many people, upon hearing a whistle or alarm (or even cries for help), won't necessarily interpret it as a distress signal. They're more likely to ignore it, move away, or become frozen and unable to act.
- If someone actually calls the police, help may not arrive quickly enough to save you from serious injury.

Noise-making devices work even better in conjunction with a Neighborhood Watch (or Apartment Building Watch) program. In that case, everyone in hearing-vicinity will know exactly what blowing a whistle means and you can use it with more confidence. The Police, under whose auspices Watch Programs operate, also teach participants how to safely provide assistance until help arrives. Call your local police department for information about how to start one.

Learning a few basic self defense strikes as a follow-up is also a good idea, so look into taking a senior-friendly course that tailors the moves around any physical limitations or disabilities the person may have. Maybe your Senior Center would bring in an instructor if you request it. Good luck!

