

# Handling a Panhandler!

By Susan Bartelstone, Crime Prevention Specialist

## More Tips:

☑ If you want to give money to a panhandler, try to have some spare change in your pocket rather than pulling out your wallet on the street.

☑ It can be dangerous to ignore a squeegee guy, put on your windshield wipers (he might break them off) or play "cat and mouse" by moving your car up slightly then stopping, then moving up again when the squeegee guy moves up. This can make him belligerent.

☑ If a panhandler is menacing you and you're in a public place, try to get to a store or doorman building where you can call for help.

☑ If you really want to help, donate time and/or money to an organization that provides social services, clothing, meals or shelter to the homeless.

## Try Humor and Humanity!



**Pre-set your phone to dial 911!**

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Visit [www.crimeprevention101.com](http://www.crimeprevention101.com) and get your free eBook "All-Time Top Tips for Keeping Yourself Safe!"

## How to Respond to an Aggressive Encounter!

**Obstructing the sidewalks, hogging seats on the bus or subway, looming at stoplights, encounters with aggressive panhandlers can be unpleasant and scary.**

What's the best way to respond: Ignore them or give money to avoid a scene? By learning an assertive, "non-victim" approach, panhandlers can usually be dealt with as just another adventure in daily living.

Encounters with panhandlers or squeegee guys are usually pretty straightforward. If you want to give money (or food or a little human kindness), why not? If you don't want to give anything, that's ok too; just keep on walking...if you can.

## Tips, Tricks and Tactics

■ **Politeness and Common Courtesy.** If your path is blocked, keep things calm with civility. Control your tongue and your temper and don't fan the flames. Don't raise your voice, yell, argue or curse. Speak emphatically in a low, deep tone without annoyance, disgust or demands to "Leave me alone!" Refrain from blurting out phrases like "Why don't you get a job." Steer clear of remarks that are sexually, racially, ethnically, or religiously offensive. Sometimes, however, that's not enough to stop a determined (or deranged) individual.

■ **"Humor and Humanity."** A calm, smiling demeanor and assertive but humorous verbal responses (humor is a powerful defusing tactic) will often do the trick if an encounter gets aggressive. Practice a response like "Hey, you wouldn't believe it but I'm as broke as you." If challenged, reply with "Don't judge a book by its cover" and keep smiling and walking. Don't turn your back until you're a safe distance away.

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**Most panhandlers are harmless, neighborhood fixtures, well known to residents in the area, even those who appear visibly mentally disturbed. A small number, however, are time bombs with the proverbial short fuse. They can become aggressive (or dangerous) if ignored or responded to rudely.**

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## Don't:

■ ignore a panhandler in a closed-in situation like a bus or subway car. This can make him/her angry and belligerent.

■ respond in a rude, confrontive way if challenged. Try to defuse the situation with humor and humanity.



✓ **Take a yearly Self Defense Course!**

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*The term "he/him" when describing a panhandler is used solely for expediency. They can be women as well as men, and teens or tweens as well as adults.*

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**Sometimes nothing can be done to prevent an undesirable outcome in a situation. Whatever you do to ensure your safety or survival is the correct response.**

■ allow feelings of disgust or distaste for the way the panhandler looks, acts or smells to show through when responding.

**Do:**

■ be polite and courteous, as well as assertive and firm, in your demeanor and responses.

■ practice walking away from situations even though you'd really rather not.

■ plan your responses to panhandlers in advance and rehearse them. Use humor and humanity if appropriate.

■ plan for the worst-case scenario and determine where you could get help (doorman, policeman) or run to if you need an escape (store, apartment building). Contact the police if you've been abused or terrorized in any way by a panhandler.

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**Resources: Crime Prevention 101 Radio Show**

**Self Defense Awareness Month:**

<https://www.voiceamerica.com/episode/43783/keeping-yourself-safe-self-defense-awareness-month>

**Primal Self Defense:**

<https://www.voiceamerica.com/episode/42490/dr-ruthless-primal-self-defense-and-the-dangers-of-sexting>