

Personal Safety And Online Resources ~ Check The Source

By Christine Schlattner and Michael Linehan

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Email safety tips often scary, often wrong. Personal safety decisions are important, so take the time to base them in accurate information. We recommend that you do not use information from unknown sources to protect the well-being and safety of yourself and your children. Find information from respected experts in the field, think it over, and combine it with your own wisdom and intuition. One particularly misleading piece seems to have traveled quite widely around the Net. Well-meaning friends have shared it because, without other information, it seems useful. You may have received the message – what's been dubbed "The Pony-Tail Email". Do you recognize the beginning?" Hi, girls! I just finished taking the most amazing self-defense class, sponsored by Shandwick, and I wanted to share some really valuable info with you before it goes out of my head. The guy who taught the class has a female friend who was attacked last year in the parking garage at Westport Plaza in St. Louis. He started a women's group and began teaching these classes soon after. This guy is a black belt in karate and trains twice a year with Steven Seagal. He and the others in this group interviewed a bunch of rapists and date rapists in prison on what they look for and here's some interesting facts:" etc. etc. Emails like this make the rounds from time to time. The information in them is often so bad, so off-base, that a conspiracy nut would be forgiven for thinking that some rapist is producing them to confuse women. The very best that can be said about them is that they are produced by a well-meaning but horribly misinformed person. They do not promote effective personal safety skills.

Let's look at a few of the points from this message, in case you haven't seen it yourself...

- The #1 thing men look for in a potential victim is hairstyle. **Untrue**
- They will look for women whose clothing is easy to remove quickly. **Untrue**
- The #1 outfit they look for is overalls because many of them carry scissors around to cut clothing and on overalls the straps can be easily cut. **Untrue**

- The time of day men are most likely to attack and rape a woman is in the early morning, between 5 and 8:30 A.M. **Untrue**
- The number one place women are abducted from/attacked at is grocery store parking lots. **Untrue**

If you put up any kind of a fight at all, they get discouraged. Determined resistance can be highly effective. To say "any kind of a fight at all" is taking it a bit too far and gives the wrong idea. If we have the old 40'S movie "Flapping The Dainty Fists On His Manly Chest" sort of thing, it's unlikely to discourage anyone. But attackers privacy and control– If someone sees the fire in your eyes and energy in your voice and body language telling him that one step closer will have bystanders calling the police and possibly put him in the hospital – yes – he will probably be discouraged! In most cases, he will, in fact, break off his intended attack.

And so on. Most of the rest of the email is similarly poor quality and dangerous nonsense with a couple of semi-valid points mixed in. You might consider cautioning your acquaintances about this and similar messages. Certainly, if you've received "The Pony-Tail Email", please promote awareness about this aspect of personal safety information and pass on corrective information. I've composed a possible message below. If you agree with this opinion, please feel free to copy and use this message.

 Hi (your friend's name),

Recently you sent me some information about personal safety. It included some tips such as: "Rapists are most likely to attack women who wear ponytails or buns. " This has been dubbed "The Ponytail Email". What follows is a response to these so-called "safety tips" by some very respected experts in the field. They feel very strongly that the information in the ponytail email is misleading and dangerous. In the interest of helping people get accurate information about personal safety, I hope you will pass on these facts and clarifications to whoever sent the email to you **and** to everyone you passed it to. Duplicate this whole message, including this paragraph. If this email makes to every woman who read "The Ponytail Email" they will be a whole lot safer.(Please notice -- the people making these comments are public figures who can be checked on Web. Their offices can be phoned.)"The #1 thing men look for in a potential victim is hairstyle. They are most likely to go after a woman with a ponytail, bun, braid or other hairstyle that can easily be grabbed." Best-selling author and nationally respected violence prediction expert Gavin de Becker comments: " In fact, this isn't even close to "the #1 thing," and "they" (as if all rapists are the same) do **not** choose their victims on the basis of some hair-grabability quotient..."De Becker continues, " Ludicrous and misleading. The reader is left to conclude that if you avoid overalls and keep your hair short, you'll be OK." Christine Schlattner, author of *Real World Safety for Women* says, "The information in this email is largely invalid and dangerous. It contains many lies. The points that are valid become dangerous because there is no information on **how to** carry them out powerfully and effectively. If a woman relied on this information to keep herself safe, she could be putting herself in great danger." Please pass this email on to anyone who asks you about the Ponytail Email message. Personal safety is important, and people need accurate information. Various "safety tips" emails have been making their way around the web in recent months. If someone is hungry for safety information, they may take it in...

Thanks, [Your Name]