

When it Comes to Awareness - Be Colorful!

Jeff Cooper, an American firearms instructor at the Gunsite Academy in Arizona, adapted and popularized the military description of the many levels of awareness in which people might find themselves. Not everyone goes through each stage, and in fact there are some that are best avoided. Keep these color-coded stages in mind as you go through your day, trying to take notice of the one you are in.

Code White: Oblivious. This is the awareness level (or lack thereof) people have who walk along the street reading a novel, looking up at the tall buildings in an unfamiliar city, or staring down at their feet. This is one of those stages to be avoided, as not only does this state prevent you from seeing trouble coming, it may even *attract* trouble to you. Criminals look for people who seem like easy victims, such as the kind they can take by surprise and who won't be aware enough to give a good description later.

Code Yellow: Alert. This is the preferred base level of awareness for everyday life. It doesn't imply paranoia or suspicion, only the lack of an assumption that everything is safe and normal. This involves looking around you, paying attention to anything unusual, and listening. This is the same kind of awareness you take while driving on a crowded highway: Keep your eyes moving, listen for sirens or screeching tires, pay attention to the little signs that tell you a car might jump into your lane, but don't be so tense about it that you jerk the wheel at every sound or sign of a brake light.

Code Orange: Threatened. This is when something in your previous state of awareness has set off warning bells inside your head and your tension level is increased. It's time to work on assessing the situation and what you can do about it, but you're not in the middle of it yet. There's still time to plan, and you may be able to avoid the situation altogether. You will probably feel a mild rush of adrenaline as your body realizes that it must prepare for fight or flight. The Orange state isn't likely to last very long - either the threat passes, or it is upon you and you move into Code Red.

Code Red: Conflict. That threat you were assessing has materialized and now you have to deal with it directly. It's time to take action, whether you choose to avoid, flee, defuse, or defend. This is where any planning that you were able to do in Code Orange comes into play, as well as the awareness of the area and situation that you've been building since Code Yellow. This stage usually entails a large quantity of adrenaline entering your system, with its attendant physiological effects.

Code Black: Panic. This is another one of those stages you'd be better off avoiding. Unfortunately, this stage is likely to follow immediately on the heels of Code White. If you never saw it coming, you're probably in a panic

when it hits. The sudden dump of adrenaline, instead of being funneled into fight or flight as in Code Red, is likely to cause a freeze-up as your brain tries to figure out what just hit it. The adrenal dump will tend to manifest as a feeling of sudden terror, which only clouds the mind further. Just another good reason to stay in Code Yellow instead of White!

After you've spent a few days keeping track of your awareness levels, where do you find you spend the most time? White, gambling that nothing will happen while you're not paying attention? Yellow, keeping a casual eye and ear out to your surroundings? Orange, in a constantly jumpy state seeing threats everywhere? Hopefully you don't find yourself in Codes Red and Black often, but if you do, consider seeking assistance. If those awareness levels are warranted, you may need some kind of protective services. If they aren't warranted, psychological help may assist in relaxation and in viewing your surroundings more realistically. Those states are extremely draining, and it's dangerous to be in them for too long, even if it isn't a life-threatening emergency that put you there.

Hopefully this brief description has convinced you that when it comes to levels of awareness, it's best to stay out of the black and white areas:

Be colorful instead!