

# Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

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*How do you feel when you enter a darkened hallway?*

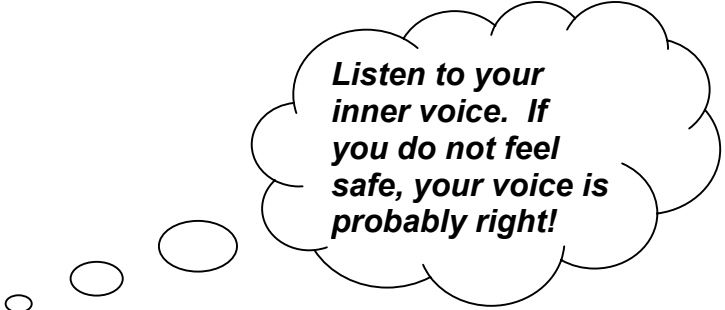
*How do you feel if you are lost, and you begin to walk or drive into an area that is run down, strewn with trash, and has graffiti in a number of places?*

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Your answers to these questions are usually based on your perception of the environment and your own personal safety. Life experiences often influence that perception. Although individuals may perceive environments differently, most individuals agree, when their impression of an unfamiliar environment evokes a sense of danger this triggers a state of alertness. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or **CePTED**, promotes a sense of safety and diminishes the incidence of crime in any given environment.

## What is CPTED?

- **CPTED** is an acronym for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.
- **CPTED** is based on the theory that the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime and in an improvement in the quality of life.
- **CPTED** consists of four key concepts, all of which are interrelated:
  1. **Natural Surveillance**
  2. **Natural Access Control**
  3. **Territorial Reinforcement**
  4. **Maintenance**
- **CPTED** emphasizes:
  1. Physical environment
  2. Behavior of people
  3. Productive use of space
  4. Crime prevention and loss prevention



***Listen to your inner voice. If you do not feel safe, your voice is probably right!***

## How can CPTED affect you and your loved ones?

If you have ever been in a place where you did not feel safe or secure, you may have been experiencing a lack of **CPTED** key concepts in use. On the other hand, if you have visited an entirely new place and felt safe and secure in that environment, intentionally or not, **CPTED** key concepts were probably in place. After reading this article, you will have a better understanding of why you feel safe or unsafe in various environments.

## CPTED Concepts

To apply **CPTED** principles, start by asking yourself the following questions:

1. What is the designated purpose of the space?
2. How is the space defined?
3. How well does the physical design support the intended function?

**CPTED** is not the total answer to community problems, but it does provide the community with the means to eliminate or reduce environmental obstacles to social, cultural, or managerial control.<sup>1</sup>

Let's talk about the four interrelated concepts mentioned in this article.

**Natural Surveillance** – The placement of physical features, activities and people in such a way as to maximize visibility.

- In commercial applications, **CPTED** principles recommend that business owners keep windows free of advertising signs and maintain landscaping, which allows for visibility (Natural Surveillance) into and out of retail space.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy D. Crowe, Criminologist and CPTED Practitioner

- In parks, shelters and overlooks should offer Natural Surveillance opportunities to many areas around the park and the walking trails. Park visitors can see others and can be seen.
- Inside multi-level buildings, having an open stairwell design creates opportunities for Surveillance as well as creating the opportunity to be heard if assistance is needed.
- Overgrown trees and/or shrubs can inhibit visibility from inside and outside a building, and is a good hiding place for a criminal.

*Design Strategies for Natural Surveillance:*

- Keep in mind what occurs when individuals are able to see from inside a home, office, business, or other designated area. People outside are able to see inside as well.
- How and where the structure is situated on its lot, and the orientation of windows, entrances, parking lots, etc., to provide maximum surveillance opportunities.
- Provide activity support in a designated area to increase the use of that area and you will then increase Natural Surveillance opportunities.

**Natural Access Control** – The physical guidance of people coming and going from a space by the judicious placement of entrances, fences, landscaping, and lighting. This principle helps deter access to a crime target or victim and creates a perception of risk to a perpetrator.

- The combination of a walkway, landscaping, and bollard lights can guide visitors to the main entrance of a building.
- A fence can provide Access Control into a neighborhood and provide opportunities for Natural Surveillance if it has an open design. A sidewalk along the fence can guide residents along the roadway and provide a safe pedestrian area.
- A security guard can monitor who comes and goes and manage where they can go.
- Mechanical Access Control may be achieved through locking mechanisms such as a double cylinder deadbolt or a card reader system.

*Design Strategies for Natural Access Control:*

- Use fencing material or landscaping to prevent or discourage access into unmonitored areas.
- Limit the number of access points into a building.
- Install mechanical or electronic locks.

**Territorial Reinforcement** – The use of physical attributes that express ownership such as fencing, pavement treatments, signage, and landscaping.

- Enlist **CPTED** concepts by using landscaping and signage to convey its ownership of the property; such as, a rock garden with a stone structure with the property name inscribed.
- Add streetscape features along the thoroughfare. Try decorative light fixtures, flags, and decorative sidewalk pavement treatment to create a sense of a vital and dedicated community.
- In a multi-family housing community, install fencing to help control access through the site. This provides Territorial Reinforcement by defining the property lines and simultaneously provides Access Control.

*Design Strategies for Territorial Reinforcement:*

- Use fencing material or landscaping to show ownership. Carefully choose materials for fences and landscaping so you can also provide opportunities for Natural Surveillance and Access Control.
- Use signs that clearly display your address or business name on mail boxes and buildings, in parking areas, or along sidewalks.
- Use sidewalks and parking areas to provide clues to ownership.

**Maintenance** – Allows for the continued use of a space for its intended purpose. It also serves as an additional expression of ownership.

- Uncut grass and weeds make a home or area look like it is not inhabited. It sends a message to criminals that no one cares and may be inviting to criminals to victimize the property. Plant new shrubs that will only grow to 2 ½ - 3 feet tall. Trees should be trimmed up from the ground a minimum of 4 feet. This encourages plants with a natural growth habit that will not interfere with **CPTED** principles.
- Owners of a business, home, and/or apartment building that maintain their property make it inviting to potential customers, guests, renters. A manicured landscape, a clean and repaired building, proper lighting, and absence of trash will help to make people feel safe.

*Design Strategies for Maintenance:*

- Use low maintenance or maintenance-free building products in your construction.
- Trim shrubs and trees regularly. Keep grass cut and eliminate weeds.
- Consider using long life bulbs for home applications to minimize frequently burned out exterior lighting.
- Install dusk to dawn sensors on lighting fixtures. Remember: Lighting is the least expensive crime prevention method.
- Remove inoperable vehicles, trash, and debris regularly.

**CPTED in Action in Spokane, Washington**

**CPTED** in Spokane’s urban planning design process integrates crime prevention with neighborhood design and community development. There is a direct relationship between design and management of the environment to human behavior. This was never truer than in the following example of great **CPTED** implementation.

In the early 1990s, Spokane began experiencing gang-sponsored drug dealing. The 1100 block of West First Avenue in downtown Spokane, adjacent to the city’s historic district, housed older, deteriorating buildings, residential high-rise hotels, the city’s only special-needs public-housing complex, a railroad viaduct, a Greyhound bus terminal, bars, an adult video store, and an extremely active gang-run crack trade.<sup>2</sup> This area was chosen by gangs because of its proximity to cheap room rentals, the bus terminal, and where residents had already “given up” the street. By 1995, the calls for services had risen to 3,300 for the year; 165 times it’s share of SPD’s attention. A survey of residents showed the majority felt captive to the inevitable loss of their neighborhood.

SPD, city agencies and residents implemented a number of responses to address the problems. One major implementation was the adoption of many **CPTED** recommendations. They improved alley lighting, banned on-street parking, removed litter, repaired and renovated buildings, fences off the viaduct (where dealers hid drugs), and changed traffic flow, restricting right turns and stopping the circling of cars for drugs and sex. Police reported a 75 percent decrease in violent crime since December 1996, and a 35 percent decrease in calls for service on the block, due mainly to the execution of **CPTED** concepts, and numerous positive-use activities by residents, businesses, SPD, Spokane C.O.P.S. volunteers, and city/neighborhood organizations.

***When we look at other cities across the U.S. and around the world that are recognized as “Safe Cities,” we can do more to maintain our “All American” recognition by getting on board with the same CPTED standards that they are utilizing.***

***Bob Cepeda, Crime Prevention Practitioner, Spokane, WA***

***Examples: Sydney, Ontario; Fort Collins, VA; Durham, NC***

They took an active part to deter crime, conveying to would-be intruders a strong sense that, if they enter, they are very likely to be observed, to be identified as intruders, and to have difficulty escaping. Architects, planners, designers, landscape professionals, and law enforcement personnel working together to evaluate new projects and redesign existing facilities are able to accomplish the **CPTED** concepts.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design guidelines can go a long way in making an environment safe.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Tackling Crime and Other Safety Problems, Case Studies in Problem-Solving, *Neighborhood Disorder*, West First Street Project narrative submitted by Spokane Police Department, 1997

<sup>3</sup> West Central Neighborhood Streetscape, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Assessment*, Bob Cepeda, Crime Prevention Specialist, July, 7, 2004