

THINK SAFETY: PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY TOPICS

We live in a society where we expect to be safe. We have paid professionals in every walk of life from law enforcement, healthcare, etc. whose job it is to ensure our wellbeing. However, we must empower ourselves through knowledge and action and take responsibility for our own personal safety. Awareness and avoidance are important elements of a safe strategy which can be blended seamlessly into your lifestyle.

Have a Personal Safety Strategy:

1. Know that a danger could exist and never forget it.
2. Admit to yourself that you could become a victim.
3. Have a plan. Know what you will do if a dangerous situation comes up. Be determined not to “freeze up.”
4. Be suspicious. Too much “faith in human nature” can make you an easy target for a vicious criminal.
5. Trust your good judgment. Common sense is the best protection.

TOPIC #1 PERSONAL SAFETY AT HOME

TOPIC #2 DON'T LET INTRUDERS DECEIVE YOU ON THE PHONE

TOPIC #3 PERSONAL SAFETY WHEN WALKING

TOPIC #4 PERSONAL SAFETY WHILE DRIVING

PERSONAL SAFETY AT HOME

The best way to stay safe at home is to keep criminals out of it. Much of the advice about staying safe at home may sound obvious, but don't overlook it – a little bit of common sense can go a long way in preventing crime.

Don't Open Your Door to a Stranger

No one intentionally puts out a welcome mat to a criminal, yet unsuspecting victims open their doors to intruders all the time, often without even thinking to ask, "Who's there?"

The simplest way to protect yourself at the front door is to observe the person on the other side before opening the door — preferably without being seen yourself. Ideally you would do this through a wide angle door viewer. If you do not know the person, you can either ignore them altogether or speak through the door or intercom to find out who they are and what they want.

Trust your instincts. You do not have to be overly paranoid, but if you are at all suspicious, do not open the door. As long as your door is closed, you have a relative degree of safety. Once you open it, however, anything can happen. And do not rely on a door chain to protect you if you plan on partially opening the door. These chains are notoriously ineffective and easy to break if someone wants to enter your house.

Here's how to handle different types of people at your door.

Emergency calls. Someone comes to your door saying they just had a terrible accident and need to use your phone right away. What should you do? First stop and think. You are home alone and something does not feel right about the situation. Trust your instincts. Do not let the individuals in.

Instead, offer to call the emergency number so they can return to the scene and wait for help to arrive. Some con artists have been known to use the emergency ruse to get into homes and commit robberies.

Fundraisers and solicitors. If a person comes to your door asking for money for a cause or wanting to sell you a product, and you're not interested in the cause or product, simply say so. If you are interested, either ask them to show identification first, before you open the door, or request that they leave literature for you to read. Should the solicitor become rude, ask them to leave, and then walk away from the door. If they don't leave, call the police.

Repairs, deliveries and collections. Unless you are expecting them, ask repair people and others who claim to have business with you to hold up their identification cards for you to see through a door viewer or door window. If you have the slightest doubt of their authenticity, telephone their business office to verify whether the house call is legitimate. You could get the number from the phone book, information or the Internet. Do the same with individuals making deliveries or taking collections. If you are not expecting a floral arrangement, you can call the florist to clear up any doubts about the person making the delivery.

Do not leave repair people alone in your home unless you know them well.

In any of the above situations, if you ask a person to leave your home and they refuse, or if something about the person arouses your suspicions, call the police. And if the person appears to be going door-to-door on your block, you will want to alert your neighbours.

TOPIC #2 **DON'T LET INTRUDERS DECEIVE YOU ON THE PHONE**

A person who is intent on stealing your property would prefer to do it when you are not there. To reduce the odds of getting caught, a burglar may phone first to see if anyone is home. They may get your name from the mailbox or from the family moniker above the door. Or they could simply look up your name in the phone book. If they get no answer, they may decide it's a good time to break into your house.

If someone does answer the phone, the potential intruder may try to get as much information as possible about the household in order to determine the best time to strike. Rapists sometimes use this tactic to determine if a woman is home alone.

Because criminals can be very good at extracting information, it's important that you treat a stranger on the phone the same way you would if that person came to your door.

Watch what you say. Warn family members not to give information to strangers over the phone about who is home, who is out, or how long anyone is expected to be gone.

Do not give your credit card number over the phone to anyone unless you initiated the call and are absolutely positive that you are dealing with a reputable organization — for example, when making reservations for a plane flight or buying tickets through an agency.

Answering machines. If you use a phone answering machine, your recording should not say that you will be gone for a specific time. It's better to say, "We can't take your call right now, but we'll get back to you as soon as possible." This is also a good message for a single woman to put on her phone machine, since it conveys the impression that she is not living alone.

For added security, some women who live alone ask a male friend to record their outgoing message.

Unlisted phone number and address.

Consider getting an unlisted phone number or removing your address from the phone book.

An intruder might see your name on the directory of an apartment building and use it to throw you off the track while calling over the lobby telephone or intercom system. Consider all of the places that your name might be seen by the public and then use your discretion about where and how you want to list it.

Obscene callers and other unusual talk.

Hang up on obscene callers immediately. Do not show that you are upset or afraid. Many nuisance calls are made by individuals who pick names randomly from the phone book. If you do not react and simply hang up, most of the time they will not call back. If the caller continues to harass you report it to the police and phone company.

When to call the police. Police should be notified if you receive an unusual number of "wrong number" calls, hang-ups, late night calls from strangers, obscene or other unusual phone calls. Call the police immediately if someone threatens you or your family. Your local phone service may also be able to offer a remedy. If necessary, you can change your phone number.

PERSONAL SAFETY WHEN WALKING

Tell someone where you are going, which route you are taking, and when you will be back.

Be aware of your surroundings. Notice everything that goes on near you and particularly in front of you. The earlier you notice a possible problem the greater chance you have of dealing with it.

Listen to your instincts. Something that doesn't look or seem right will probably cause a problem – so if you notice something like this, move yourself away from it as quickly as possible.

Walk facing the traffic.

Walk near the curb unless cars are parked in the street. Stay away from shrubbery, darkened doorways, and alleys where an assailant can be hiding.

Never assume parked cars are empty.

Avoid using headphones - you might not hear trouble approaching. If you use headphones, it is recommended that you keep the volume low enough to allow you to hear anyone approaching as well as any traffic coming in your direction.

Be wary of casual requests from strangers (someone asking for directions, a cigarette or change - they could have ulterior motives).

Be alert. Look over your shoulder once in a while.

Never accept rides with strangers.

If you carry a purse, briefcase, or bag, keep a tight grip on it so no one can steal it.

Enjoy your walk, but always remain aware of your surroundings.

If you suspect you are being followed by a pedestrian:

- Cross the street.
- Don't try to figure out if someone is following you by turning down an alley or dark side street.
- If you know you are being followed, go directly to the nearest well lighted business and call the police.

If you are being followed by a vehicle:

- Turn and walk in the opposite direction. The driver will have to turn around and drive on the other side of the street to keep following you.
- Get the license number and write it down.
- Never try to outrun a vehicle. Change directions whenever possible. You can make a u-turn faster than a vehicle.
- Seek help at a place of business.

PERSONAL SAFETY WHILE DRIVING

Before driving your car:

- Be sure your car is in good running condition by having regular maintenance.
- Have your door and ignition keys ready when you get close to your vehicle.
- Look behind the front seat before getting in to make sure no one is hidden on the floor waiting for you.
- Right after you get in, lock all the doors and roll up the windows.
- Keep a pad and pencil handy, either in the glove compartment or in the visor.
- Keep your valuables out of sight, not on the seat next to you.

Whenever possible, travel on well lighted, busy streets.

Try to always be aware of your exact location.

Remember landmarks and place names around you.

Travel with a cell phone or coins for an emergency phone call.

Keep the car in gear while stopped at traffic lights. If you are threatened, hold down the horn and drive away as soon as possible.

Never pick up hitchhikers.

If your car breaks down in an isolated area:

- Raise the hood.
- Sit inside the car with the doors locked until help arrives.

- Leave the windows up while you talk to whoever comes near. It may be safer to stay in your car than to go with strangers to get help.
- If someone comes up to your car and you do not have a cell phone, ask them to phone the police or a tow truck, etc. and wait in your car.
- Remember that highways are frequently patrolled.

If you think you are being followed by a person in another car:

- Do not go home.
- Drive to the nearest police station or open business. If you have a cell phone call 911.
- Do not allow another car to force you to the side of the road.
- Use your horn to get attention and call for help.
- If possible, get the license number and write it down.

When you arrive at your destination:

- Park in a well lighted spot as near as possible to your destination.
- Look around for people before leaving your car.
- If you must leave your key in the vehicle when parking in an attended lot, remove it from the key ring and take all other keys with you.
- Keep the registration and insurance information with you.
- Lock your car.