

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.