

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.