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## **Safety Plan**

*Building a safer Home Environment*

# Building A Safer Home Environment

People expect to feel safe and secure in their own homes and statistically the likelihood of a physical encounter with an intruder is low. The chances of such an event happening can be reduced by installing appropriate security devices. This will increase the level of protection in the home, and potential risks to personal safety can be further minimized by observing sensible security practices. While presented with the safety of women in mind, these suggestions can equally apply to any householder. The advice concentrates on those issues relating to personal safety.

## GENERAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS:

- It is unwise to leave door keys under a flowerpot, mat, in a letterbox or similar hiding place. Burglars find them.
- Be wary of leaving keys with trades people - keys can be copied. Items left lying around such as ladders, tools, gardening implements, lawnmowers and bicycles, can attract a criminal onto the property, and some of the items may be used to gain entry.
- Open garage doors and open windows can also be attractive to criminals. Windows should have security fittings, particularly if left open.
- If you are at home and leave any exterior doors open or unlocked, consider that a prowler could take the opportunity to gain easy access.
- If you arrive home and you think there has been a burglary, do not enter, an intruder may still be inside. Go to a neighbour and telephone the Police.
- When arriving home alone it can be a good idea to carry a personal or remote alarm for your car or house. If your safety is threatened you can easily activate your alarm.
- Carry your house keys in your hand for quick entry if needed.
- It is important not to overlook potential fire hazards when considering home security practices. The installation of smoke alarms and availability of fire extinguishers are ways you can reduce the risk of a serious fire occurring in your home.

## EXTERNAL SECURITY:

- Be aware that large shrubs, plants, or very high fencing can provide a place for prowlers to hide.
- Thorny plants along fencelines can discourage prowlers from climbing over, and having fully enclosed fencing with a gate creates a barrier. Prowlers are less likely to target such a property with restricted access and restricted escape routes.
- Ensure your house number can be clearly seen from the road at all times. Visibility of a street number at night is important for Police and other services responding to any emergency.
- Many people choose to display their names on letterboxes or doorplates. A woman living alone might consider using her initials rather than identifying gender by use of her first name.

- Consider fitting exterior sensor lights to deter prowlers. If returning home at night a sensor light installed near the front door will provide good visibility of the surrounding area.
- Joining Neighbourhood Watch and displaying Neighbourhood Watch, Beware of Dog and burglar alarm signs, can discourage criminal activity.

## INTERNAL SECURITY

A home that has security features will increase the level of protection against intrusion. Basic measures to increase security are:

- Fitting deadlocks to outer doors and internal access garage doors.
- Fitting lockable bolts to sliding doors and French doors.
- Fitting door viewers and security chains.

## OTHER MEASURES

- Installing a burglar alarm.
- Having a panic button for the burglar alarm in your bedroom.
- Having a light switch within reach of your bed and a telephone with a list of emergency contact numbers.
- Replacing any hollow external doors with solid core ones fitted into sturdy framing, or installing security screen doors on the outside.

## RESPONDING TO PEOPLE AT THE DOOR - MALE OR FEMALE

- Observe first. Always check by looking through a window or door viewer.
- Only open your door partly with security chain connected.
- Refuse entry if in doubt and telephone the Police or a neighbor.
- Switch on outside lights when dark to see who is there.
- Think "suspicious". Strangers may be thieves trying to gain entry.
- Only open the door after examining identification and satisfying yourself it is genuine.
- If you are alone you can create the impression that someone else is present by shouting out that you will answer the door.

## WAYS PEOPLE MAY ATTEMPT TO GAIN ENTRY TO YOUR HOUSE

- Asking to use the telephone.
- Asking for a glass of water.
- Asking for donations.
- Conducting a survey.
- Impersonating sales representatives, officials, trades people and others.

## WAYS TO RESPOND MAY INCLUDE:

- Saying NO.
- Leaving the person outside and offering to make a telephone call for them.
- Denying entry until telephoning their office to verify that they are legitimate.

You should not compromise your safety by opening the door to strangers or allowing them inside, unless you have established that it is safe to do so.

If you have advertised an item for sale and have arranged for a stranger to view it, a good idea could be having a friend or relative present in your home.

## PROWLERS ON THE PROPERTY:

- Prowlers are either potential burglars or the peeping type who will peer through any window where curtains or blinds have not been drawn.
- A woman by herself in the home can place objects on a porch or similar place, suggesting the presence of another person at the address. A pair of large size boots for example may deter a prowler.
- If a prowler is seen, telephone the Police immediately. A description should be provided of the person, clothing, and direction of travel if the person has run away.
- After telephoning the Police remain quiet and do not alert the prowler, provided your safety is not being threatened. This will allow the Police a better chance of apprehending the prowler. However, if you think the prowler is about to break in, switch on the lights if at night, and make as much noise as possible.
- It is best not to go outside even if you think the prowler has run away. Going outside could expose you to danger if the person is still nearby or returns, and your presence could hamper Police personnel and dogs engaged on search and tracking operations

## INTRUDERS:

Having a predetermined safety plan will enable you to make the best decision for dealing with an emergency. Making a safety plan involves consideration of the following issues:

- Whether you are alone or if there are children or other adults present in the home.
- The internal layout of your home for access to any children and escape routes.
- Proximity to neighbors and boundary features of your property.
- An agreement with your neighbors on how they will respond.
- Utilizing an existing room as a safe area, which must have a telephone installed, window security, and a door able to be securely locked from the inside.
- Choosing to use a safe room or to escape from the home. This will depend on the particular situation and personal circumstances, and factors to consider may include:
  - a) The risks of encountering an intruder inside or outside the property during an escape.
  - b) Whether ground floor windows are accessible if an exit door is blocked by an intruder, and physical agility to climb out and run to safety.

## EMERGENCY ACTION

- Try to avoid any contact with the intruder.
- Telephone the Police on **911** at the earliest opportunity that it is safe to do so.
- A quick decision must be made to either secure yourself (children) in a safe room, or to escape from the home.
- If you decide to secure yourself in a safe room, telephone your neighbours as well as the Police.
- If you do encounter the intruder, try and move out of the way.
- Call out to somebody else in the house to telephone the Police, even if you are alone.
- You can attract attention by breaking windows and shouting loudly things like "Go away", "Get out of my home", "Somebody call the Police".
- If you cannot avoid the intruder and shouting and making a noise has no effect, an alternative is to make yourself calm, then in a firm manner tell the intruder to leave. Being assertive is an important self defence technique.
- Display a confident manner, hold your head up, pull your shoulders back, stand tall.
- Be prepared to physically defend yourself. The most vulnerable parts of an attacker's body are the eyes, nose and genital area.
- You are allowed to use force against your attacker when defending yourself, but be aware that if you use something as a weapon in self defence, it could be turned against you.
- You can find out about self defence classes in your area.
- During an emergency activate any available, fitted, remote or personal alarm system when it is practical and safe to do so.

## TELEPHONE SECURITY

- When using the telephone, don't give personal information to strangers or callers representing themselves as market research or telemarketing companies as they may not be genuine.
- When answering the telephone, it may be better to use "Hello" rather than reveal your name or telephone number. Do not let strangers know that you are at home alone.
- When it appears a caller has dialed your number by mistake, do not supply your name, address or telephone number. Ask the caller the number wanted then advise that a dialing error was made.
- When recording an answering machine message, do not indicate what times you will be in or out, and keep personal information to a minimum.
- A woman living alone could consider using the term "we" on the recording tape, or have a male friend record the message.



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