

Personal safety

Facts

- Fact one** The chance that you or a member of your family will be a victim of violent crime is low.
- Fact two** Violent crimes are comparatively rare and account for a very small part of recorded crime.
- Fact three** Young men are more likely to be victims of violent crime than women or the elderly.

The best way to minimise the risk is by taking sensible precautions.

Remember

You may do this already, probably without realising it. Personal safety is not new or mysterious, it is mostly COMMON SENSE.

How can you stay safe?

The following fact sheets look at some aspects of personal safety and how you can reduce some of the risks.

- Personal safety in the home
- Personal safety out and about
- Personal safety on public transport
- Personal safety when driving
- Personal safety - what men can do
- If the worst happens
- Sources of advice and information

In the home

Make sure your house or flat is secure

The Development Notes on 'Buildings and property' have some useful advice on how to make your home secure.

Strangers at the door

Not all burglars use force to enter premises, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to the bogus official or random caller.

Most callers are probably genuine but some are not.

They could be confidence tricksters or thieves. It is important to take precautions when people call at your home. Bogus callers often pretend they:

- are antique dealers;
- are roof repairers;
- are tarmac drive layers;

- need to use the telephone urgently;
- have kicked a ball in your garden and need to retrieve it;
- feel unwell;
- are from the gas, water or electricity board;
- are from the local council;
- are looking for someone by name, but aren't sure where they live.

Doorstep code

BEWARE OF CALLERS!

When someone comes to your door, follow these simple steps this advice could stop you from letting a bogus caller into your home.

- Keep the door locked.
- Look out of the window or use the spy hole if you have one, to see if you can identify who the caller is. If there is more than one person be suspicious - it is unusual for a company to send more than one person. Is the caller wearing a uniform or is there a company car parked outside?
- Go to the door. Make sure the safety chain is on before you open it.
- Does the caller know your name?
- Ask for an identity card - all reputable companies insist their representatives carry one. Look at the card and check:
 - does the card look like an official company card?
 - is there a photograph - does it match with the caller at your front door?
 - does the card carry the company name?
- If you are unsure, close the door and go and look up the telephone number for the company in the telephone directory. Don't rely on a telephone number the caller may give you - it could be a bogus number. Call the company and ask for verification. Ask them to tell you your account number. Then, open the door, keeping the safety chain on and ask the caller to tell you your account number. If the caller is unable to tell you, do not let them in.
- If you have any doubts at all, don't open the door. Keep the caller out and telephone the police on 999.
- If you live in a controlled entry block of flats or sheltered accommodation, do not let in anyone who presses the buzzer and says they are looking for someone else.
- Children or young people at home on their own or babysitting should never open the door to strangers, no matter who they say they are.

Remember

Genuine callers will normally make an appointment first and will carry identification with their photograph attached.

Key security

If other people, such as previous tenants, could still have keys that fit - change the locks. Don't give keys to workmen or tradesmen, copies can be made.

Hearing the sound of an intruder

Only the individual can decide how to handle this situation. Here are some suggestions:

- keep quiet and avoid attracting attention;
- switch on the lights and make a lot of noise;
- if alone, call out loudly to an imaginary companion. Burglars do not want to risk a confrontation.

Discovering signs of a break-in

If you discover an open door or smashed door or window, do not enter, go to a neighbour and alert the police.

Draw your curtains after dark

Especially if you are alone.

Telephone extension upstairs or in the bedroom

This can provide reassurance and it allows calls for assistance to be made discreetly. But in any event, ring the police as soon as it is safe.

Telephone directory entries

Use only surname and initials or consider going ex-directory.

Answering the phone

Simply say 'hello' and do not give your name. If the caller claims to have a wrong number ask for it to be repeated. Never give information about yourself to a stranger or disclose you are alone.

Abusive or threatening phone calls

Put the receiver down and walk away. Return a few minutes later and replace the receiver. Do not say anything (an emotional reaction is what the caller wants). If calls persist tell the police and your telephone company. Keep records of dates and times of calls.

British Telecom have a service for people who are subjected to nuisance calls. They can provide you with advice and help. Their number is in the 'Sources of help and information' page.

Selling your home

Don't show people around your home alone. Ask the estate agent to send a representative when anyone wishes to view. Also, when selling unwanted items, make any appointments for when someone is with you.

Out and about

We all have to go out and about whether to work, school, to shop, or to socialise. This part of our everyday life should not be curtailed, but by following some simple steps we can all move about in safety and with confidence.

Carrying a bag or briefcase

- Check it is closed with the opening facing towards your body.
- Don't keep your keys in the bag/briefcase. If your bag is snatched, you won't lose the keys as well.
- Remember if your bag is snatched, don't confront the thief. Your safety is more important than property.

Put your wallet, purse or valuables out of sight

Use an inside buttoned pocket. Consider using a body belt or bum bag.

Avoid danger spots

- Dark alleys
- Waste ground
- Alleyways
- Short cuts

Keep to well-lit streets if possible.

Joggers and cyclists

If you go out regularly to exercise, vary your times and route. Stick to well-lit roads and pavements. On commons and parklands, keep to main paths and open spaces and where you can see and be seen. Avoid wooded areas.

If you think you are being followed

Keep moving and make for a busy area, like a pub, petrol station, or shops.

Don't hitch-hike or accept lifts from strangers Always make sure you have details of public transport and enough money to get home.

Remember

- A personal alarm can be very useful but it must be ready for immediate use. (Make sure it is designed to continue sounding if it is dropped or falls to the ground.)
- Self-defence and safety awareness classes may help people feel more secure.

On public transport

Fact Travelling by public transport is generally very safe, but take a few simple precautions.

Buses and trains

- Know where you are going and the stop you need.
- Check departure times, especially last buses and trains.
- Have your ticket or change handy. This ensures your wallet or purse stays out of sight.
- Try to stay away from isolated bus stops, especially after dark.
- On an empty or late-night bus, sit near the driver or conductor.
- On a train, sit in a compartment where there are several people. If you feel uneasy, move to another seat or carriage.
- Don't be afraid to use an emergency alarm. Check where it is on boarding.

Taxis

Most taxi and minicab firms provide a safe and reliable service, but again some simple precautions are wise.

- Use a reputable taxi and minicab company. Carry the number to contact again.
- Hail a licensed taxi - one displaying a Taxi roof sign and Hackney carriage plate.
- If possible book by phone. Ask for driver's name and make/colour of car. Confirm these on arrival.
- If you can share a taxi with a friend - do so.
- Always sit behind the driver. If you chat, don't give away personal details.
- If you feel uneasy, ask to be let out in a well-lit area where there are plenty of people about.

When travelling in taxis it is always a good idea to take a note of the taxi's licence number. The taxi and its driver can always be traced with this number.

If in doubt, don't get in.

When driving

Keep all windows and doors locked

- Whenever you are inside the car. Bags, earphone and valuables should be kept out of sight.
- If you have a window open, don't wind it down too far. Someone could reach in whilst you are stationary.

Make sure your vehicle is in good condition

Especially for any long trip.

Plan your journey

- Make sure you have money, fuel and a map.
- If you plan to meet anyone, tell them of your route and arrival time.

If someone tries to flag you down

Drive on until you come to a service station or somewhere busy. You could call the police. (However, someone could simply be drawing attention to a problem with your car, for example a flat tyre, so use your common sense.)

After dark, park in a well-lit, busy place

- If using a car park look for one displaying the Secured Car Park signs
- Look round before you get in.
- When parking in daylight, consider how things will look if returning at night.

Have your keys ready when you go back to the car

Make sure there is no one in the car.

If your car develops a problem

- Use a mobile phone or find a telephone. (If on a motorway, pull into a service station, or leave at the next exit. On motorways follow the marker arrows to the closest phone. NEVER cross the carriageway.)
- If you stop on the carriageway, stop as far to the left as possible and put on hazard warning lights.
- On motorways, don't wait in the car if at all possible - there is a high risk of an accident. Wait on the embankment with the front passenger door open. If you feel threatened, lock yourself in the car and speak through a small gap in the window.
- Don't accept lifts but wait for the police or breakdown service.
- Some people carry 'HELP CALL THE POLICE' signs to alert passing motorists. However, you may feel uneasy about drawing attention to your situation. You will need to assess the risks yourself (for example, are you alone? is it dark?).

What men can do

Men can help by taking the issue of women's safety seriously. Consider these points:

- If walking in the same direction as a woman on her own, don't walk behind her - cross the road and walk on the other side. This may reassure her she is not being followed.
- Don't sit too close to a woman on her own in a railway carriage or bus.
- Consider the consequences of your actions. Staring, whistling, passing comments etc, can be threatening to a woman.
- Help women friends or relatives. Give them a lift, walk them home and see them safely indoors.

If the worst happens

What would you do if someone attacked you? Could you fight back, would you resist, could you escape? Only you can decide in that situation, but preparing for all possibilities could give you a split-second advantage.

- If threatened: shout, scream and set off a personal attack alarm. This may unnerve the attacker and frighten them off.
- You have the right to defend yourself, with reasonable force - your umbrella, keys, bag, hair or scent spray can all be used.

The law doesn't allow the carrying of anything which can be described as an offensive weapon, for example a knife, CS spray etc.