

# Outsmarting Crime:

122423

## A personal guide to safer living

122423

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice



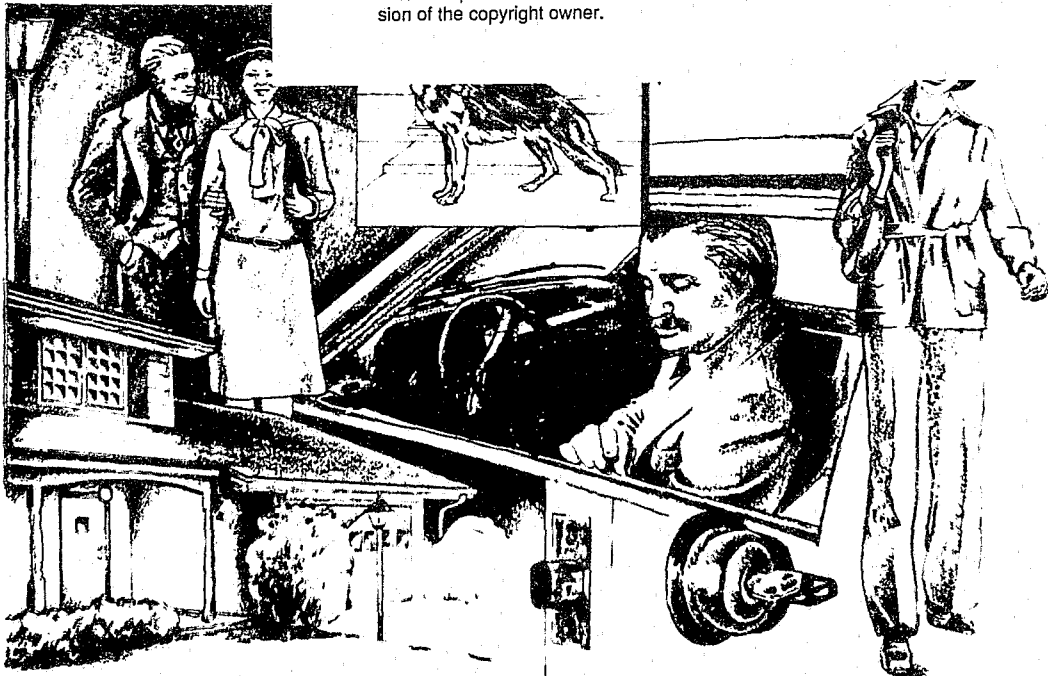
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## Introduction

# FACTS AND MYTHS ABOUT CRIME

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Most studies and polls show that the fear of crime ranks as one of the chief concerns of citizens.

This concern can be healthy if it leads to positive steps to reduce the chance that you will be victimized. This booklet is intended to help you to be smart... to be prepared to cope with today's crime problem.

At the same time, unjustified fear can become a very negative influence which mars one's enjoyment of life.

By way of introduction, here are some facts we should all know about crime today.

- The crimes we all fear the most are crimes of violence, but those are the ones that happen the least.
- **Most** murders and assaults are committed by relatives or friends as the result of a dispute, and **not** by strangers.
- Older people are **not** victimized to a greater extent than the rest of the population, with a few exceptions, such as purse snatching.
- The most frequent crimes are property crimes, and they are most likely to happen when you are away. You can help reduce the risk by following the steps outlined in this book.

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These facts are generally consistent in all research. They suggest that people need not live with a paralyzing fear of crime. They also suggest that each of us can deal with the situation intelligently by taking steps to **reduce the opportunity** for crime at our home and in the way we live.

Before we consider methods of reducing opportunity, let's look at typical criminals. They probably are not accomplished professionals. Rather, they are amateurs or, perhaps, what we might term skilled amateurs, probably young.

These amateurs are going to be looking around for an **easy opportunity** to get something of value in the **easiest possible way**. Thus, the greater opportunity we present and the easier we make it, the more we increase the chance that it will happen to us.

Crime prevention is the practice of spotting criminal opportunities and then doing something to reduce or eliminate those opportunities in a common-sense way.

The more we can do to make it harder for the thief —by increasing the **time, visibility or noise** factors—the more we are going to discourage him/her from selecting our residence as a target in the first place.

Thus, we can discourage the thief by being smart enough to reduce opportunity ... by being prepared.

NCJRS

MAR 15 1990

ACQUISITIONS

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# **IT'S A CRIME IF YOU'RE NOT PREPARED!**

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There are three fundamentals which must be the foundation of any effective crime prevention program.

They are:

1. Property Marking
2. Residential Security
3. Neighborhood Action

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## **The Fundamentals: I. PROPERTY MARKING**

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The first fundamental, property marking, is as old as the practice of branding cattle. Today it is most commonly known as Operation Identification. There are three good reasons why you should join Operation Identification:

1. It helps prevent crime in the first place when a potential thief can see the Operation Identification sticker indicating that your property is marked.
2. If your things are stolen or even lost and later recovered, your driver's license number or state I.D. number (available from the State Motor Vehicle Administration) provides instant identification of the rightful owner. This is true even if the property is recovered in another county or state, thanks to the law enforcement computer network.
3. Your driver's license number or state I.D. number will be positive identification and therefore solid proof of possession of stolen property. This will be a big help in prosecuting those who took or had your property.

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This is how Operation Identification works.

- Get an engraver. Most police or sheriffs' crime prevention units will loan an electronic engraving tool at no charge. (These also can be purchased for \$5-\$10 at many hardware and department stores.)
- Mark your Maryland driver's license number followed by the letters MD. A sample listing would look like this:  
A-000-000-000-000 MD  
You should especially mark the types of items which are most commonly stolen: TV's, stereos, cameras, guns, etc.
- List all your valuable property as an aid in determining the loss in the event of theft. A sample list appears in the back of this book.
- Then advertise the fact that you've joined Operation Identification by placing the stickers in a prominent place on or near all exterior doors of your residence. Stickers are available from your law enforcement agency.

Don't forget to mark items you keep in your car, such as a tape deck or CB radio; and place one of the smaller stickers in a visible place on those items and on the wing or side window.

Invisible-ink markers available from some agencies and stores can be used to mark items which are not easily engraved, such as fur pieces, paintings, crystal, antiques, etc. It is a good idea to take a color photo of any such items. Also take color photos of the four walls in each room of your home.

One final note: Operation Identification is most effective when used on a widespread basis by people in a neighborhood. Please see the section of this booklet on Neighborhood Action.

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## The Fundamentals:

# II. RESIDENTIAL SECURITY

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A second fundamental of crime prevention is the installation of good security features at home. This section of the booklet presents highlights of sound security. The crime prevention unit of your local law enforcement agency can provide you with more details and, in many areas, will send someone out to do a "premise survey" to pinpoint the security strengths and weaknesses. If you follow the tips given here, you will be practicing the basics of sound residential security.

### LOCK UP!

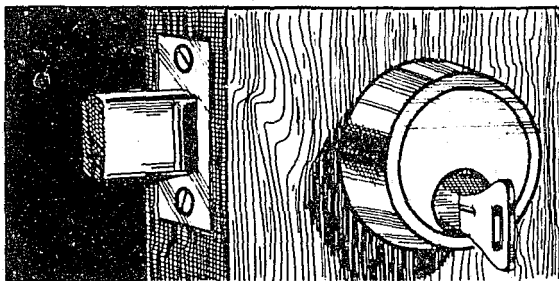
Amazingly, 30 to 50 percent of home and apartment burglaries happen because someone didn't lock a door or window. Often, windows are even left open.

The practical advice which follows doesn't do any good if you don't learn to close and lock doors and windows as a matter of habit, even if you're going to be gone only for a few minutes.

Remember: **A lock is not a lock unless you lock it.**

### LOCKS

Many homes and apartments, particularly modern ones, have locks which burglars can open relatively easily. To make your doors harder to open, get a good lock. This is a technical subject and there are lots of different kinds of locks, but only one recommended by the majority of law enforcement experts: the one-inch, deadbolt lock. It looks like this:



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The strike plate that the bolt goes into should be fastened with screws at least three inches long. Short screws will not hold up under the pressure of a crowbar, for example.

Perhaps you've never thought of budgeting a few dollars to improve your security but a good lock for each exterior door is one of the best investments you can make! Your locksmith or hardware store will have a one-inch, deadbolt lock. Get one for each exterior door. Don't settle for anything less.

An inside chain guard is no substitute for a proper lock.

## **DOORS AND FRAMES**

Several varieties of doors are unsafe because they are easy to smash and open. The best exterior door for a home or apartment is metal or solid-core wood 1 3/4" thick. Fragile, hollow-core doors should **never** be used for the exterior of a home or apartment.

Your police or sheriff's crime prevention staff can evaluate your present doors and make recommendations.

There are ways of strengthening less-than-adequate doors at modest expense. For example, add a 1/2" plywood plate over the wooden panels. If a door has a large piece of glass in it, you can install a metal grill or a security panel (3/16" polycarbonate material).

Consider strengthening the frames around your exterior doors and the hinges that attach the door to the frame. Otherwise, a swift shove could open your door by breaking the hinges or the frame.

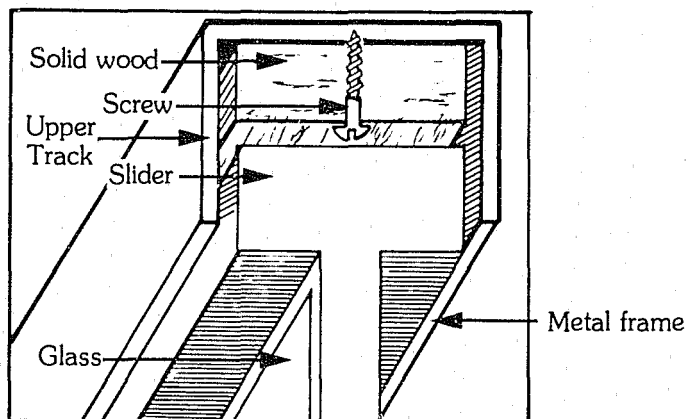
Remember that a side or back door, being less visible, may be subjected to a stronger attack than your front door. Good security is important for **all** exterior doors on every home and apartment.

A 190° wide-angle peephole installed in solid doors will help you identify people who come to the door. You also should have adequate lighting at all exterior entrances.

Sliding glass doors offer the burglar several means of entry. These include prying the doors open with a screwdriver or prybar, lifting the door or window out of its track, or breaking the glass. To secure the sliding glass door, each of these means of entry must be dealt with individually.

Little can be done to prevent the intruder from breaking the glass. (Many will not use this means of entry since breaking glass is noisy and dangerous.)

To prevent the door or window from being lifted out of the track, a wood or metal bar of the proper thickness can be screwed inside the upper track. This will permit the door to slide properly but will not allow the door to be lifted out of the track. See sketch below.



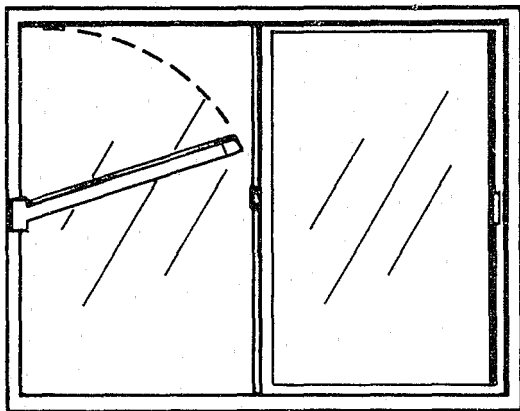
*Upper Track of Sliding Glass Door*

There are several types of locks available for sliding glass doors. Contact your police or sheriff for information regarding them.

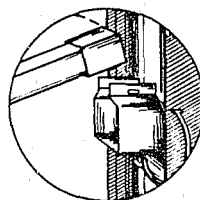


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The Charlie Bar or similar device with a retaining bracket should be used as additional security. See sketch below.



*Charlie Bar*



*Retaining bracket*

**DO NOT USE THE CHARLIE BAR AS THE ONLY MEANS OF SECURITY FOR SLIDING GLASS DOORS.**

## **WINDOWS**

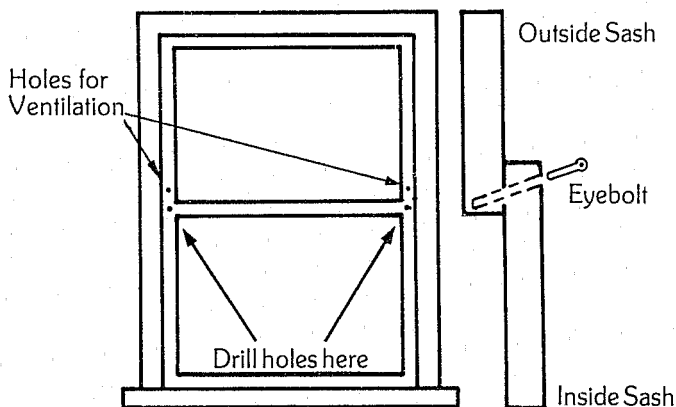
Most windows come equipped with latches. Because many window latches do not provide ideal security, it is a good idea to supplement them. Special locks (e.g. barrel bolt locks) are now available to provide extra security for various types of windows. (Note: In case of fire or other emergency which would require quick evacuation from the home, everyone in the family should know how to use the lock. Further, the key for the lock should always remain at a designated place so that everyone in the family knows its location.)

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In addition to locks, there are two other inexpensive techniques for securing windows. For windows that slide sideways, use the same method as described on the preceding page for sliding glass doors. For traditional, double-hung windows, window pinning is recommended.

To pin double-hung windows: at each top corner of the inside sash, drill a hole through the inside sash and three quarters of the way through the outside sash at a slight downward angle. Insert two 5/16" diameter eyebolts, one on each side of the window. The bolts should fit loosely enough in their holes so that they are easy to insert and remove. See sketch below.

A separate set of holes can be drilled into the outside sash approximately three to four inches above the inside sash so that the window can be left open for ventilation. This prevents the window from being opened further than the three or four inches allowed. See sketch below.



The important thing to remember is: **Secure your windows**—especially when you are leaving, even if only for a short time.

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## **APARTMENTS**

If you live in an apartment or retirement facility, you may not be able to implement some of these suggestions. However, you can talk to the manager about a specific plan to upgrade the security in your building. It probably will be more effective if you get several tenants together when you approach the manager. Official security standards have been adopted in some areas and should be of assistance to you.

## **OUTSIDE FACTORS**

Remembering that good visibility will discourage the potential burglar, you should have at least standard lighting at your doorways. Depending on your home and yard, you may wish to add some additional lighting around back, for example.

Heavy landscaping can provide a welcome screen for the intruder. You can control this factor by some additional pruning and, if necessary, transplanting.

Don't leave extra house keys "hidden" nearby; most of the hiding spots are pretty obvious and the burglar can discover them.

Get a mailbox which is large enough to totally conceal mail, or install a mail slot in your door. Uncollected mail suggests that no one is home.

Don't leave ladders out that could be used to reach a high window.

## **GARAGES**

Failure to close and lock garage doors presents a serious security problem. If an intruder gains entrance to the garage, he or she will be concealed and may find the tools necessary to continue the burglary into the home.

Manufacturers' locks on garage doors are usually poor in quality and can be easily defeated. Contact your local law enforcement agency to find out the proper locks for your garage door.

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If your garage is attached to your home, the connecting entrance needs to be secured in the same way as your front and back doors. The garage door into the house often is the easiest entry for the burglar. You need a solid door with a one-inch, deadbolt lock.

## **WHEN YOU'RE AWAY**

It's extremely important to make your home or apartment look "lived in" when you're away, even if it's only for a matter of hours, or overnight. The same precautions we take when going on a two-week vacation, for example, should be used for an overnight trip. It's a good idea to ask a trusted neighbor to maintain your day-to-day routine. For example:

- Keep the garage door closed and locked at all times so no one can see when your car is not there.
- Use automatic timers or ask a trusted neighbor to turn your lights on at night and off in the morning and to turn a radio on as well. Vary the lights you leave on (bathroom one night, kitchen the next).
- Ask a neighbor to fill a garbage can and put it in front of your house.
- Ask the neighbor to pick up your newspaper and mail. Do not tell the newsboy that you will be gone. If you are going to be away a long time simply cancel your paper; don't enter a "vacation stop".
- Ask the neighbor to park his or her car in front of your house from time to time to give the appearance that someone is coming and going regularly.
- Don't allow any kind of travel plans to be reported in advance. (This is especially likely to come up in connection with group tours.) Don't talk about travel plans in public places, either.

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The Fundamentals:

### **III. NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION/ BLOCK WATCH**

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The third fundamental is neighborhood action. The crime prevention steps you and your neighbors take as a group are just as important as the things you do individually. **In fact, widespread participation will make your individual efforts even more effective in deterring burglary, theft, vandalism and robbery.** These programs, often called Block Watch or Neighborhood Watch, can work equally well in an apartment building or complex as in an area of single-family homes.

To begin a neighborhood action program, contact a crime prevention officer with the law enforcement agency serving your community. Set a time when the officer can meet with a group of your neighbors to discuss the particular crime problems in your area and to develop a plan of action.

The plan should include an effort to get everyone to mark their property and to inform everyone of good home security practices. In addition, it should include watching out for suspicious or unusual activities in general and, specifically, keeping an eye on each other's homes during those times when no one is at home.

You will find it helpful to use a chart similar to the one on the back page. Writing in the addresses and telephone numbers of your neighbors in advance is a good idea in case you need to call in with a specific report or for any kind of emergency.

A concerned and watchful neighborhood is important in preventing crime because most burglars are amateurs. They will be discouraged if they think they might be observed or if they see stickers indicating the property is marked. Second, information you or your neighbors give the police about suspicious activities often will result in quicker and more successful efforts to solve crimes which might occur.

Ask your area law enforcement about other community crime prevention programs such as a Block Parent or Safe House Program which provides a haven for children who find themselves in emergency situations on their way to or from school, or a telephone reassurance program or escort program to assist older or disabled persons.

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## OTHER CRIME PREVENTION TIPS

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### CRIME PREVENTION FOR CHILDREN

It has been said that children are our most valuable resource. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that we take positive measures to insure their safety and prevent them from becoming victims of crime.

#### **Parents. . .**

- NEVER leave children alone; not at home, in a vehicle, at play, or anywhere.
- Define what a STRANGER is. Let your kids know that just because they see someone everyday (e.g., mailman, paperboy, neighbor, etc.) it does not mean these people are not strangers.
- Teach your children their full name, your name, full address, and phone number, including area codes. Teach them how to use a phone.
- Teach your children the "What If . . . ?" Game, making up different dangerous situations that they might encounter and helping them play out what they would do in that situation.
- Take the time to talk to your children and be alert to any noticeable changes in their behavior or attitude toward an adult or teenager; it may be a sign of sexual abuse.
- Set up procedures with your child's school or day care center as to whom the child will be released to other than yourself, and what notification procedure they are to follow if the child does not show up on time.
- Teach your children that their body is private and no one has the right to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If anyone touches them in a wrong way they should: SAY NO, GET AWAY, and TELL SOMEONE they trust.

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## AUTO AND BUS SECURITY

Whether you drive or use public transportation, it is always safer to travel with at least one other person.

If you use a bus regularly, get and use a schedule to minimize the length of time you have to wait—perhaps alone—at the stop.

If you own a car, keep it locked **at all times**. That means when it is parked **and when you're driving it**. Keep the windows rolled up high enough so that an intruder can't reach inside. If you do this as a matter of habit, you'll always be protected.

If you are harassed by someone on foot, honk your horn in short blasts and drive off. If you are being followed by another car, also honk your horn in the same way and pull into a police or fire station, drive-in restaurant, gas station or some other well-lighted place where others can help you. Never go home while still being followed. If you do, you will be indicating your address to the person following you.

Always park in well lighted areas. When returning to your parked car, have your key ready to unlock the door without a lengthy pause. However, look inside the car first to make sure someone isn't waiting in hiding.

If you have car trouble, turn on your emergency flasher, but wait inside with doors locked. If people stop to help, **don't** get out. Rather, ask them to call the police. If they really want to help, they'll make that call.

Similarly, if you see a car in trouble, don't stop to help. Go to the next available phone and notify the police.

As a habit keep valuables out of sight. Remove the temptation of the sight of your bags and packages by locking such things in your trunk.

Don't pick up hitchhikers.

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## BUNCO (CON GAMES)

There are many types of fraudulent activity, but bunco is a specialized type of swindle.

Two of the most obvious, yet frequent, bunco schemes are:

### **Pigeon Drop.**

This one accounts for about half of the con games reported to the police! The swindlers claim to have found a large sum of money and offer to "share" it with you, but request you to withdraw "good faith" money from the bank. The swindlers take your good faith money, then make phony arrangements for you to collect your share of the found money.

### **Bank Examiner.**

A phony bank examiner contacts you and asks for your help in catching a dishonest bank employee. He/she asks you to withdraw a specified amount of cash from your account and turn it over to him so he can check the serial numbers. After turning you money over to the "examiner", you never hear about it again. Banks **never** use this procedure; only con men do.

If you are contacted by someone using one of these schemes or something similar involving any amount of your money, **don't** get or turn over any money. If possible, call the police promptly, so that they can try to stop these bunco artists from swindling the next person they contact.

Swindlers often will be well dressed, talkative and intelligent. They don't deal in force; they are trying to win your confidence. They will play to your natural inclination to be helpful, or to take advantage of a windfall...to get something for nothing.

Be highly suspicious.

Never give any money to a stranger.



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## **CONSUMER FRAUD**

Citizens of all ages have problems with business practices which are misleading and deceptive.

Senior citizens are also frequently targets for a range of investment possibilities involving retirement living or retirement incomes. There is no magic way to get rich so you should enter any investment program only after carefully checking all relevant factors.

Talk to people at your bank, other business advisors as appropriate, and the Better Business Bureau or consumer affairs office in your community. The main thing to remember is: don't act impulsively. If you take time to carefully plan your investments, chances are that you won't fall into swindles or other problem deals.

## **MONEY**

Money is a temptation to the thief. If you get Social Security or certain other retirement payments, you can have them deposited directly into your bank account. That way, you eliminate the chance that they'll be taken from your mailbox or, worse, that you'll be observed taking a month's livelihood to or from the bank.

Once you have that money deposited at the bank, use cash as little as possible and don't ever carry large amounts of cash. You may be able to pay some of your bills right at the bank. Better yet, use a checking account to pay all your bills and to pay for groceries and other purchases as well.

If you need to withdraw savings for a special purchase, get the amount as a check from the bank, not in cash.

## **PERSONAL SECURITY**

If you get into the habit of not giving people opportunities to commit crimes, you will develop your own safety patterns. Here are a few of the more common suggestions.

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**At Home.**

Install a peephole and a deadbolt lock in your door. You don't have to open the door to strangers, and shouldn't if you are at all suspicious or uncomfortable. Insist on seeing identification and if you are at all suspicious go to the telephone to verify the ID **before** opening the door. If someone wants to use your phone, offer to make the call while he/she remains outside your locked door.

**Walking.**

To the extent you can plan your trips, morning is the safest time to be out walking. Daytime is better than night. Consider varying your walking patterns. Whenever possible, go with at least one other person. Stay on busy, well-lit streets and walk close to the street, not right next to the buildings. Stay alert. Never carry large amounts of money and, if possible, don't carry a purse (see later section on purse snatching).

**Telephone.**

If callers won't identify themselves, hang up. They have absolutely no right to invade your privacy without courteously identifying themselves. Never give out personal information on the phone. Keep a police-type whistle near the phone and if you receive an obscene call, blow it as loudly as you can into the voice portion of the receiver. Single women should use initials instead of first names in the telephone book listings or request an unlisted number.

**Whistle.**

If you are concerned, it might be a good idea to carry a whistle in a handy spot. If you are being bothered or feel you may be attacked, blow on it in repeated bursts and sit down on the ground (to reduce the chance of getting knocked down) unless, of course, you can get to a safer place, such as a place of business nearby.

**Weapons.**

Don't carry them. They can too easily be turned against you.

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## PURSE SNATCHING

The best way to avoid purse snatching, of course, is not to carry one, if at all possible. This may not be as impractical as it might first appear.

To begin with, it is a wise idea to carry your house key separately from your other things. That way, if your purse or wallet is lost or stolen, the key won't be there along with your address. When walking, for example, you could carry your house key on a chain around your neck.

Next, you can put a small amount of cash and/or a credit card in either a wallet or a compact cosmetic case and then carry either one concealed in a coat pocket. Some women have had small hidden pockets sewn on the inside of their coats for the same purpose.

If you can get by without a wallet or compact, you can carry a small amount of cash, check book or credit card in a pocket of your jacket or sweater.

When you think about it, a big reason for carrying a purse is force of habit. And when you really think about it, it might be worth modifying that habit in order to reduce the opportunity for crime.

If you must carry a purse, don't dangle it by your side in a way that a thief can run by you and grab it away. Carry the purse close to your body, preferably in front.

Bulky purses are the easiest to spot and grab, although shoulder bags are harder to get free. Don't wrap the strap around your wrist; you're likely to get hurt if a robber yanks hard.

If someone does grab at your purse, don't attempt to resist or fight him/her off. You're likely to get injured in the process. If you carry a whistle, blow it repeatedly and observe the robber as closely as possible to try to get a description for the police. Think of age, height, color and length of hair, skin color, clothing. If you can note those things, you'll be doing well.

When shopping, don't tempt a thief by leaving your purse on a counter or in a shopping cart unattended. It only takes a second for someone to remove it.

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## WHAT TO DO IF...

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If you are experiencing a crime, you are going to have to use your own best judgment in handling the situation. Our general advice covering most circumstances is:

- Don't attempt to resist or to attack
- Try to avoid being injured
- Don't carry any weapons.

If you return to your residence and suspect someone is inside, **don't** go in! Go to a neighbor's place and call the police.

If you are in bed and a burglar enters your residence, stay as quiet as possible and call the police at the first safe opportunity.

It is extremely unlikely that you will be confronted by a burglar in your home or apartment. If you are, don't attempt to corner him. Many amateur burglars will flee under the circumstances if left an "escape hatch." You may be able to get out yourself, but don't try to if it means rushing the intruder, or if he has a weapon.

If the burglar does not leave, keep as calm as possible under the circumstances. The burglar probably is nervous because of your presence. Try not to escalate the situation or provoke the burglar into injuring you. Avoid confrontation.

Do discreetly observe the burglar and try to remember the description, including age, height, weight, color and length of hair, skin color, clothing, etc. This information will be vital to the police in catching this person.

When the burglar leaves, try to observe (without following closely) the type and color of vehicle and what direction it heads. See if you can read and remember even part of the license number.

Then call the police immediately. While waiting for the police, write down all you can remember.

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Unreported crime is a serious problem for several reasons, one of which is that by not reporting, you are assuring the ultimate success of the crime and the probability that the criminal will attempt another attack soon on someone else.

The same advice applies to any situation where you might be assaulted somewhere other than at home.

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## ON GETTING INVOLVED

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The effectiveness of crime prevention practices such as are discussed in this booklet increases as more people get involved. Therefore, it is in your own interest, as well as the interest of the community, to get your neighbors and your various clubs and organizations involved.

A good way to **begin** that involvement is to have your local police or sheriff's crime prevention officer speak to the group.

Follow-up is vital. Have someone in the club make sure that everyone has crime prevention literature and a chance to participate in Operation Identification and residential security.

Since neighborhood action is particularly important, your members could be encouraged to have coffee hours at their homes. They can invite their friends and neighbors to see what crime prevention involves and to encourage them to join, also.

You will find encouragement and support for anything you would like to do in the crime prevention field. A summary of some of the more important resources appears next.

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## RESOURCES

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As you consider getting involved in crime prevention, you'll find virtually everything you need is available free.

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Through the combined efforts of Maryland Crime Watch, local law enforcement agencies and private organizations, you will find trained persons to provide some guidance and a wide variety of informational booklets, films, slide shows and the like. Engraving markers usually may be borrowed at no charge.

For more information, contact:

MARYLAND CRIME WATCH  
(301) 442-2706

Maryland Crime Watch is a program of the  
Maryland Community Crime Prevention Institute  
Police Training Commission  
Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services  
3085 Hernwood Road  
Woodstock, MD 21163-1099

A variety of free crime prevention materials may also be obtained from the following national groups:

National Crime Prevention Council  
733 15th Street, N.W., Suite 540  
Washington, D.C. 20005

American Association of Retired Persons  
1909 K. Street, N.W., Room 596  
Washington, D.C. 20006

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
1835 K. Street, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20006

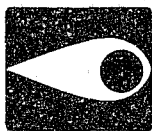
If you are interested in joining a professional organization for the promotion and advancement of crime prevention activities in Maryland, write:

Maryland Crime Prevention Association  
P.O. Box 20397  
Baltimore, Maryland 21284-0397

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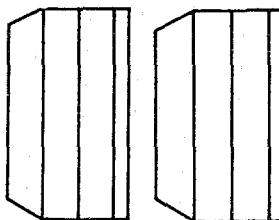
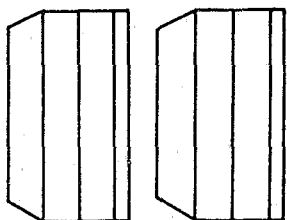
# BLOCK WATCH CHART

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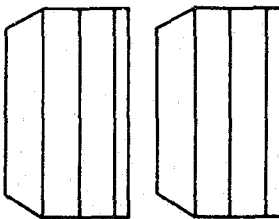
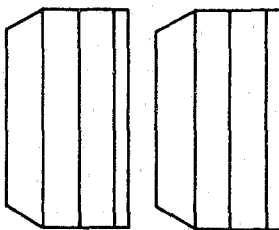
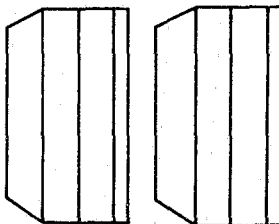
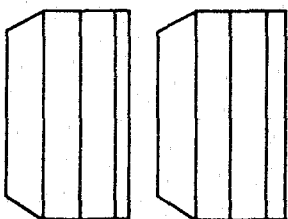
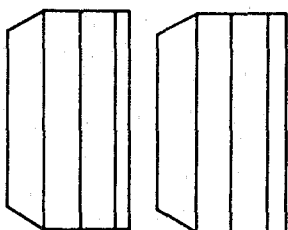
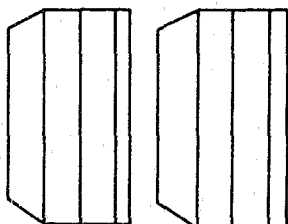


Fill in your own address and the name, address and phone number for your neighbors. If you see suspicious activity around your neighbor's house, call the police/sheriff emergency number.

POLICE/SHERIFF EMERGENCY NO. \_\_\_\_\_



**STREET**



**STREET**

# EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Police/Sheriff Emergency .....

Fire Emergency .....

Neighbor .....

Neighbor .....

Doctor .....

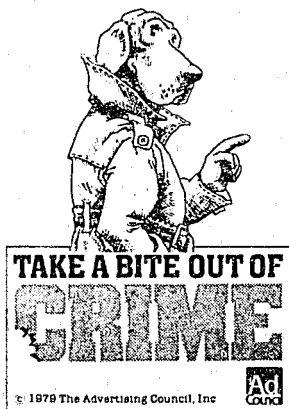
Dentist .....

Pharmacy .....

Apartment Manager .....

Crime Prevention Officer .....

Other .....



*We encourage photocopying or reprinting this brochure. Camera ready proofs may be borrowed from Maryland Crime Watch.*

