

PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS FOR OLDER ADULTS

CRIME IS A FRIGHTENING PROBLEM especially for older adults. You may be concerned about burglary; fraud; muggings; and purse snatchings. But, as an older adult, you don't have to feel helpless. You can learn how to reduce your chances of becoming a crime victim.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?

You can start by learning some basic crime prevention information. For example, it helps to know:

- Criminals look for the easiest opportunities to commit a crime.
- Look for and remove any opportunities before criminals spot them.

You **don't** necessarily need physical strength, agility, speed or expensive security devices. You **do** need to be alert, cautious and self-confident.

AT HOME, CONSIDER THESE TIPS

Keep doors locked

- Install easy-to-use deadbolt locks.
- Don't attach an ID tag to your key ring.
- Install new locks if you move to a new home or lose your key.
- Keep garage and basement doors locked at all times.

Secure windows

- Draw the curtains and blinds at night.
- Don't leave your windows open at night. Use floor or ceiling fans for air circulation.

Install and use a peephole

- Never open the door to strangers or let them know you are home alone. Ask service people for an ID before you open the door. If you did not request service, call the agency (look phone number up in the phone book) and verify the call for service.
- Remember, chain locks can be forced open.
- If someone asks to use your phone, make the call for him or her. Never let a stranger into your home.

Consider a pet

- Even a small dog can provide some protection besides the companionship.

Protect valuables

- Keep money and other valuable papers and securities in the bank or safety deposit box.
- Have your Social Security or retirement check deposited directly into your bank account.
- Mark your valuables (TV, VCR, and computer equipment) with your driver's license number and the state's abbreviation.
- Keep an inventory list of your valuables and note model and serial numbers on that list. Videotape your home and take 35-mm photos of your valuables. Keep a copy of the list, videotape and photos in your safety deposit box.

Organize a buddy system

- Have neighbors watch out for each other and report suspicious activity to the police department.
- Don't shop alone—take a friend—and don't shop at night.

Beware of phone scams

- Don't give personal or financial information to anyone over the phone.
- If you are a woman living alone, don't reveal that information to anyone on the phone.
- Hang up on nuisance callers and report chronic nuisance calls to the phone company.

WHEN YOU GO OUT, PLAY IT SMART

Secure your home

- Make sure all exterior doors and windows are secured.
- If you will be returning after dark, have an interior light set on a timer so when you come home, there will be a light on in your home.
- Don't leave a note on your door and never leave a house key under the doormat, in a flowerpot, or on the ledge of the door.
- Garage doors should always be kept closed and locked—even if you are home.

Street precautions

- Always be alert to your surroundings and the people around you.
- Avoid walking alone at night. Try to have a friend accompany you in high-risk areas—even during the daytime.
- Walk close to the curb—avoid doorways, bushes and alleys where someone could possibly hide.
- Make eye contact with people when walking.
- If you are carrying a purse, don't dangle it from your arm. Carry it securely between your arm and your body. If a purse-snatcher tries to steal your purse, your personal safety may depend on not trying to hang on to it. Consider wearing a fanny pack instead of carrying a purse.
- When you are in a store, never leave your purse in a shopping cart.
- Don't carry any more cash than is necessary. Many grocery stores accept checks and automatic teller cards.

While waiting for a bus

- Avoid isolated bus stops.
- Stand away from the curb until the bus arrives.
- Don't open your purse or wallet while boarding the bus. Have your pass or money already in your hand.

On board the bus

- Stay alert and be aware of the people around you.
- Sit as close to the bus driver as you possibly can.
- Never fall asleep on the bus.
- Keep your purse in front of you and hold it close with both hands.
- If someone bothers you, change seats and/or tell the driver. If you observe any suspicious activity, tell the driver.

Vehicle security

- Always lock your car doors when you get into your car.
- Keep your passenger window rolled up.
- Keep your purse on the floor next to you not on the passenger seat.
- At night, drive on streets that you are familiar with and that are well lit.
- Wear your seatbelt properly.

Park smart

- At home, if you have a garage, use it. Lock your car and make sure your garage is secured.
- If you have to park in your driveway, don't leave your garage remote control in plain view.
- In parking lots, park as close to the store as you can. At night, park under a light. Have someone from the store escort you to your car if you need assistance.
- Never leave a parking attendant your house keys.
- Don't leave valuables or packages inside your parked car where they can be seen. Lock them in the trunk.
- Don't have a key ring that has your name and address on it.
- Take your parking stub with you—don't leave it in your car.

KNOW WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF A CRIME

If your home is burglarized while you are out

- Don't go in if you suspect someone is still inside your home.
- Call your local law enforcement agency from your neighbor's home.
- Don't touch anything once you do enter your home. You may destroy potential evidence.

If someone breaks into your home while you are there

- Don't confront the burglar.
- Lock the door to the room you are in or lock yourself in the bathroom if you are unable to leave your home safely.
- Call **9-1-1** immediately.

Let law enforcement officials help

- Report any crime, attempted crime or suspicious activity.
- Give details, including height, weight, clothing, appearance, license plate number and information about witnesses.
- Press charges when if the criminal is caught. This helps protect others.