

## Safety In Your Car



The following information is provided by A Positive Action Handbook entitled "A Senior's Guide to Crime Prevention." This handbook is distributed to seniors by the Rocky River Police Department in Rocky River, Ohio. The information was shared with the editor of WPSN and, therefore, has been included in this document. We are sure that you will find it to be an extremely useful resource. Comments in brackets are those of the editor of WPSN.net.

### CHECKING YOUR CRIME PREVENTION AWARENESS

1. It's safest to keep your keys in your pocket or purse until you reach your car or home.  
**FALSE** - It is safest to have your key in hand before you reach your car or home. Searching for a key can leave you open to attack.
2. It's best not to answer the door at all if you don't know who is there.  
**FALSE** - Burglars often ring the doorbell to see if anyone is home before attempting to break in. It's best to respond to the doorbell without opening the door.
3. Don't list your first name in the phone book; give only your initial.  
**TRUE** - Listing your first name in the directory gives strangers information you may not want them to have.
4. You should fight a thief to save your money or other valuables.  
**FALSE** - Your belongings are never as important as your life. It's best to give them up and hope doing so will save you from harm.
5. A good doorknob lock with a chain lock is all you need on your front and back doors.  
**FALSE** - a deadbolt lock with at least a 1-inch bolt is the best type of lock to prevent break-ins.
6. Many police departments will send someone to your home to check out your locks and other safety features.  
**TRUE** - Many police departments will send someone to advise you about your home's safety features, including locks.
7. If you come home to find an open door or a broken window or screen, do not go inside.  
**TRUE** - Never go into a house if a burglar may still be inside. Go to a neighbor's home [or wherever you will find access to a phone] and telephone the police.
8. It's okay to keep important papers in the car as long as they are locked up in the glove compartment.  
**FALSE** - Never leave any papers in your car that will help a car thief [by giving more information about you such as your home address] or that will cause hardship for you if stolen.

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## **STREET SMARTS FOR SENIORS - IMPORTANT CHECKLISTS**

*As with all efforts to prevent victimization, seniors must be alert, confident and aware of their surroundings. As you may already know from [www.WPSN.net](http://www.WPSN.net) and this document, the editor of the site and author of this publication highly recommends that everyone carry a cell phone - see additional information about cell phones for seniors in the section about protection devices.*

### **CHECKLIST FOR SAFE TRAVEL**

1. Use the safest and most direct route.
2. Travel in the daytime and with one or more people whenever you can.
3. Avoid wearing valuable jewelry that might tempt a thief.
4. Carry only the money or credit cards you will need. Bring change for the bus and for emergency phone calls. Carry your wallet in your front pocket or inside jacket pocket. Or try carrying your money in a money pouch or fanny pack.
5. If you use a purse, carry it firmly, close to your body and hold onto the clasp. Place it on your lap when seated and never leave it unattended.
6. When returning home, have your house key in hand before you get to your door.
7. If someone drives you home, ask them to wait until you are safely inside.
8. If you see an open door or a broken window or screen, go to a neighbor's house and phone the police. Do not go into the house.

### **CHECKLIST FOR SAFETY WHILE OUT WALKING**

1. Be alert to everything around you and walk confidently. *[Although you may want to keep your eyes on the ground where you are walking so as not to trip, try not to keep your head continually facing downward - this can appear as an indication of vulnerability.]*
2. Face traffic so you can see oncoming cars.
3. Avoid dark, lonely areas (such as empty lots, alleys, or construction sites).
4. Don't carry anything that keeps you from moving freely and quickly.
5. If you need to ask directions, go into a store or public building.
6. If someone looks suspicious, head in the opposite direction or cross the street and walk quickly away.
7. Carry in your hand a loud whistle, shriek alarm [Personal Attack Alarm], or pepper spray. *That way, you will have it ready in an emergency. Keep in mind that pepper spray is not appropriate outside if there is a breeze -- it may be blown away from the intended target and could blow back into your own face or onto your skin. See more information regarding pepper spray and personal attack alarms in the section about protection devices.*

### **CHECKLIST FOR USING BUSES AND TRAINS**

1. Wait at busy, well-lit stops and/or by the ticket counter.
2. Never enter an empty train car. Go to one with people on it.
3. Don't carry too many packages--always have a free hand.
4. Sit in a seat as close to the driver as you can.
5. If someone starts bothering you, scream.
6. Watch who gets off with you at your stop. If you feel uneasy, walk directly to a place where there are other people. *You may consider getting back on the bus.*

### **CHECKLIST FOR PROTECTING YOUR CAR**

1. Be sure to take your car key out of the ignition and lock your door and windows. (In 40% of car thefts, the keys were left in the car. Even worse, 80% of stolen cars were left unlocked!).
2. If you need to leave your car key--for example, for valet parking or car repair--hand over only your car key. (Put your car key on a small key ring that can be separated from your other keys.)

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3. Do not hide spare keys in your car.
4. Never leave your car running when you get out, not even for a moment.
5. Consider buying anti-theft devices such as a steering column lock and alarm.
6. Keep your car in good running order. Always make sure it has plenty of gas.
7. If you get lost, drive to the nearest public place to ask directions.
8. If someone suspicious approaches your car, honk your horn. Drive away if you can.

### **CHECKLIST FOR ANSWERING THE DOOR OR PHONE**

1. Do not open the door to a stranger. (If someone needs help, do not let them in. Offer to place a call for them.)
2. If a delivery or repair person arrives without notice, ask for their name and the phone number of their company. Then check with the company before unlocking the door.
3. If you are listed in the phone book, use your initials instead of your first name. Do not list your address.
4. If you get prank phone calls, hang up at once. Call your local phone company for advice.
5. Never give information to wrong number callers. Ask "What number are you calling?"
6. *[Install a storm/screen door with deadbolt locks. Keep it locked when you are home to prevent strangers having immediate access to you when you open your door.]*

### **CHECKLIST FOR KEEPING YOUR HOME SAFE** *[also see Safety in Your Home]*

1. Remove or prune bushes that hide windows or doors. Do not give someone trying to break into your home a hiding place.
2. Light your outside entrances, garage doors, pathways, stairwells, and trash and parking areas.
3. Put only your first initial and last name on mailboxes and building directories. If you live alone, list a fictitious roommate.
4. Report to your local utility company any street lamps that are not working.
5. Do not leave ladders or tools outside. A burglar could use them to break in.

### **CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU LEAVE** *[to go away from home]*

1. Ask a neighbor to collect your mail and newspapers daily. Or contact the post office and newspaper to stop delivery while you are away
2. If you will be gone for a long time, arrange for someone to mow the lawn, shovel snow, rake leaves, etc.
3. Make sure a family member, neighbor, or the police knows when you will be away. Tell them how to reach you in an emergency.
4. Use timers to turn some lights on and off at certain times. Timers can also be used to turn a radio or TV on or off.
5. Leave some window drape, blinds, or shades open so the house will not look closed up. Do this on upstairs windows where no one can see in.
6. Turn the ringer on your telephone to "low" or "off." This way, a burglar will not hear the phone ringing and realize no one is home.

### **CHECKLIST TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAMS**

1. If you have doubts about a business, phone the Better Business Bureau.
2. Never pay for products or services ahead of time unless you are sure the company is reputable.
3. Read everything in a contract before you sign it. Do not sign anything you feel nervous about or do not understand. See a lawyer.
4. Do not let anyone pressure you to sign anything or to give an answer right away.
5. Beware of overly friendly strangers. (Scam artists report that the key to selling a scam is to first

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become friendly with the victim.)

6. If a sales person will not give you straight answers, stop the conversation.
7. Never give out personal information such as your social security, bank account, or credit card numbers over the phone unless you initiated the call and know to whom you are talking.
8. If someone tells you to place a 900 call to “win” something of value, think first. You pay for 900 area code calls; the cost can be as high as \$10 per minute.
9. Be careful of contests, give-aways, sweepstakes, free vacation offers, investment offers, and cures for illness or aging. Many are scams.
10. Remember: If it sounds “*too good to be true*” it probably is.

### **CHECKLIST FOR PROTECTING YOUR MAIL**

1. Have social security checks and pension checks deposited directly into your bank account.
2. Never send cash through the mail. Send a personal check or money order.
3. When you send out mail with a check in it, drop it in the mailbox. If you must use your own mailbox, place the envelope in it shortly before your mail carrier is due to arrive.

### **CHECKLIST FOR PROTECTING YOUR CREDIT CARDS**

1. If your credit cards are stolen or lost, report the loss to the issuers right away.
2. If you buy something by credit card, get the carbons (*if there are any*) and see that they are destroyed in front of you.
3. Be careful about giving your credit card number over the phone. Do so only when you have placed the phone call and you know the business.
4. Make sure that no other customer in a store sees your name, credit card number, *or security number* — *3 digits on signature side for VISA, MasterCard, Discover and 4 digits on front for American Express*. Someone who knows this information can make charges on your card by phone.
5. Do not throw away credit card slips with your name and number on them without first tearing them up.
6. Never carry your PIN (Personal Identification Number) with your credit cards or write them on your cards. Memorize them instead.

### **CHECKLIST FOR USING BANKS AND CREDIT UNIONS SAFELY**

1. Make sure that funds deposited your bank or credit union are federally insured and, if insured, what is the maximum amount covered under that insurance.
2. If you are going to the bank or credit union with valuables, ask a trusted relative or friend to come with you.
3. Keep a list at home of all the items in your bank or credit union safe-deposit box. Make sure the list is in a safe place, such as a fire-proof storage box.
4. If you must withdraw a large amount of money, get a cashier's check or use a wire transfer.
5. If you think you are being followed, tell security or a teller at the bank or credit union. Do not leave the building by yourself.
6. Try to go into your bank or credit union to deposit or withdraw money rather than use the Automated Teller Machines (ATMs).

**REMEMBER -- IF SOMEONE TRIES TO ROB YOU, HAND OVER YOUR MONEY OR VALUABLES. THEY ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN YOUR LIFE!** *You may consider putting some bills in a money clip or separate wallet, separate from other money and credit cards. Only take the credit card you may need. Keep valuables and other money and credit cards on your person, in pockets or money belt, in case your purse or wallet is stolen from you. However, give up everything without hesitation if you feel it best to do so.]*

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### **PARKING**

1. Choose a well-lit space. Make sure you can easily see your car and the area around it from a distance. Note where you parked.
2. Look around before you get out of your car. If you see suspicious-looking people around, drive on.
3. Lock all doors while you are in the car and when you leave it.
4. *Be sure your windows are up and doors locked at all times - when at stop signs or traffic lights, when you are parked and still in the car.*

### **RETURNING TO YOUR CAR**

1. Have your car key ready before you reach your car.
2. Before you get into your car, check that no one is hiding in it.
3. Keep purses and packages out of sight - in the trunk or under the seat/on the floor.

### **IF YOUR CAR BREAKS DOWN**

1. Put on the emergency flashers.
2. Stay inside your locked car if it is safe to do so.
3. Raise the hood or hang a white cloth on the door handle or outside mirror as a sign you need help. *Place a "Call Police" sign in the rear window if you have one (see *Safety in Your Car*).*
4. If another driver offers help, open the window slightly to talk to him or her. Have the person phone for help. *Do not get out of the car.*
5. Don't let anyone in your car and only accept a ride from the police or local highway patrol or from a professional towing service who responded to your call for help. *Join a car association such as AAA.*
6. Consider buying a car phone for emergencies.

### **IF A CAR HITS THE BACK OF YOUR CAR**

1. If you feel unsafe, stay in your locked car until police arrive. The accident may be a ploy to lure you out of your car.
2. If you fear you are in danger note the license number and description of the car. Drive away and call police when you're in a safe place.
3. If the other driver leaves, note the license number, color, and model of the car. Do not follow the car.

### **IF YOUR CAR IS BEING FOLLOWED**

1. Do not drive home or pull over. You could be trapped. Instead, drive to the nearest police or fire station [*as fire stations are always manned, your best choice may be the nearest fire station*] or to a [*busy*] public place where you can phone the police.
2. If you think it is unsafe to get out of your car, honk your horn steadily and flash your lights. *If you have a cell, phone 911.*
3. Try to get the license number and description of the car following you. Report it to the police.

### **THE DOs AND DON'Ts OF PROTECTING YOUR HOUSE KEYS**

1. **Do** give a spare key to a trusted friend or neighbor in case you get locked out.
2. **Do** change your locks immediately if you lose your keys.
3. **Don't** hide house keys anywhere outside. A burglar might find them. *If you can think of that one*

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*place no one would think to look, the burglar has already thought of that place!*

### **SAFETY-PROOFING DOORS AND WINDOWS**

1. Install a peephole or wide-angle viewer so you can see who is outside.
2. Be sure that outside doors are solid metal or hardwood- never glass or mostly glass.
3. Use more than a doorknob lock or chain lock. You should also have a deadbolt with at least a 1-inch throw (*the bolt that slides into the door frame*).
4. Be sure that all windows have a locking device.
5. Check at the hardware store for locks that will work for your type of windows. Also ask about installing steel pins; they stop some types of windows from opening fully.
6. Remember to secure your basement and attic windows. *Never leave a window open if you leave the room. If you need to leave it open, install a locking device that will allow the window to be locked in that open position that is no more than 6 inches open.*

### **LIST AND IDENTIFY VALUABLES - Marked property puts off thieves, helps police, and speeds up insurance claims. Many libraries and police stations lend out engraving tools.**

1. Engrave valuable property with some marking.
2. Keep photos of your valuables and a current list describing each item, with brand and serial number if appropriate.

### **GUARDING AGAIN FRAUD -- STOP FRAUD BY REPORTING IT**

1. One-third of people who are victims of scam artists report them to police. Report these criminals so they cannot take advantage of you or someone else in the future.
2. Agencies to contact include:
  - local police or sheriff's departments
  - local postal inspector
  - state insurance commissioner's office
  - area Office on Aging
  - Social Security Administration
  - state attorney general's office
  - local or state consumer complaint departments

### **IF YOU USE AN ATM**

1. Go only during the day.
2. Use drive-up ATMs rather than walk-ups, if possible.
3. If using a walk-up ATM, lock your car and take only your ATM card and your car keys to the machine.
4. Get back into your car and do not use the ATM if you see anyone suspicious-looking hanging around. *If your gut feeling is that someone is making you feel uncomfortable, that is all you need to know -- get back in your car! Whether or not that person will cause you harm is not at issue. Why wait to find out?*
5. Enter your transaction quickly and scan the area around you.
6. Take your cash or receipt and leave quickly.
7. Never accept help from a stranger by the ATM.

### **WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE A CRIME VICTIM**

**YOUR CHANCES OF BEING A VICTIM DECREASE AS YOUR SAFETY MEASURES INCREASE. BUT EVEN PEOPLE WHO ARE CAREFUL CAN BECOME VICTIMS OF CRIME.**

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**IF YOUR HOME IS BURGLARIZED WHILE YOU ARE AWAY**

1. Do not go in if you think anyone may still be inside. Go to a neighbor's home or a public phone. Call the police right away.
2. Do not touch anything.

**IF SOMEONE BREAKS IN WHILE YOU ARE AT HOME**

1. Do not confront the burglar.
2. Lock yourself in a bedroom or other room.
3. If there is a phone in the room, quietly dial 911.

**IF YOU ARE ROBBED**

1. Give up your valuables. They are less important than your safety.
2. Phone police right away.
3. Try to remember what the robber looked like and what he or she was wearing.

**IF YOU ARE ATTACKED OR RAPED**

1. Hitting, biting, or screaming may allow you to escape, or it may lead to further harm.
2. If the attacker has a weapon, it is usually safer not to fight.
3. If you choose to fight, shout "fire." "People are more likely to respond to "fire" than to "help" or "rape." Or use a personal attack alarm or pepper spray. *See section on protection devices.*
4. Phone police right after the attack. Do not wash. It destroys evidence. Also, go to the hospital or a doctor as soon as you can.
5. There are victim assistance and rape crisis programs in many cities. Contact them if you need emotional or financial help.
6. Press charges when the criminal is caught. This helps stop future crimes.