

Reducing the Risks in a Home Invasion Robbery

All activities in life involve risk. Balancing the risks involved in activities with the need for safety and security is a delicate process, and is more art than science. No one wants to live in a walled fortress with bars on the windows; nor do we want to live with the constant threat of victimization. Somewhere in the middle lies the fine line balancing the two, allowing for a reasonable level of freedom while also providing for responsible security measures.

Below, you'll find suggestions that may help reduce the risk of being the victim of a home invasion robbery, and may also help reduce the risk of being injured in such a crime.

Prevention At Home

Prevention is always the preferred method in dealing with criminal activity. Successful crime prevention deters events from taking place, thereby avoiding victimization in the first place. While it is not always possible to deter crime, there are some things you can do to reduce the risk of home invasion robberies:

- Avoid conspicuous spending. Avoid leaving boxes from expensive items at the curb for trash or recycling removal. Thieves passing by may be attracted by such packaging, and may target your home for this reason. Similarly, thieves are often attracted to homes displaying obvious outward signs of wealth. Be aware of the outward image you portray.
- Have quality locks installed on all entrances to your home and use them. Doors, including garage doors, should not be left open during the day, even if you are in the house or yard. Chain locks are not an effective means of securing doors and can be easily broken. Don't rely on them for home security. Deadbolts are highly effective, and should be used whenever possible. Horizontal security bars placed in the track of a sliding door will further enhance security. Locks should be re-keyed when moving into a new home.
- Maintain control of all keys to your home. Leaving a set of keys with a trusted friend, family member, or neighbor is reasonable. Don't leave copies of keys hidden outside your home, under the doormat, under rocks, or other unsecured areas. Key rings should not contain personal information, names, or addresses. Never give house keys to parking attendants or auto repair shops. If a key is lost or stolen, replace the locks as soon as possible.
- Don't open the door to speak to people you don't know. Stranger safety doesn't stop at childhood. Many home invasion robbers enter the home when a resident opens the front door to speak with them. Have a peephole installed in your front door at a convenient height and be sure not to block it with decorations. Ask for identification from utility workers or repairmen. Don't allow anyone you don't know into the home to use the phone, bathroom, etc. Children should also be taught these procedures.
- Install quality locks on your windows, especially at ground level. Double hung windows can be further secured by pinning sashes, or through the use of a vertical security bar similar to that used on sliding doors. Windows left open for

ventilation should be secured so that they can't be opened enough to allow entry to the home.

- Avoid putting your name on the mailbox or house, in the telephone directory, or on your answering machine. Criminals may use your name to gain your trust.
- Don't leave your schedule on an answering machine, or indicate when you will or won't be home to people you don't know. Don't provide personal information over the phone. Never reveal to a caller that you are home alone. Don't give your phone numbers to "wrong callers"; ask what number they're dialing, instead.
- Mount lights near each entrance to your home, and use timers, light sensors, or motion sensors to activate lights automatically. Lights should be mounted high enough to deter tampering. If you notice your lights activate at night, don't leave the home to investigate.
- Keep lights inside the home on timers to create the sense that someone's home. Radios or televisions can be used for the same purpose. Blinds and curtains should be closed at night.
- Remove or reduce foliage near doors, windows, and walkways. They may provide possible areas of concealment. Shrubs should be trimmed to below 3' in height, and tree branches should be trimmed to at least 7' from the ground.
- Consider creating a safe room within the house with solid doors, secure locks, and contact with the outside world. Many use the master bedroom for this purpose.
- Engrave your driver's license on all valuable property. Keep written and photographic records of valuables such as jewelry or antiques. Keep these records in a secure location. Don't leave valuables in easily targeted locations such as visible jewelry boxes, dresser drawers, or nightstands.
- Be alert to your surroundings. If a situation causes you alarm, listen to your instincts and get away. Have your door key in hand when approaching your entryway. If you are driven home, ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside. Never go into your home if anything seems unusual, such as an open door or broken window. Leave immediately and call the police.
- Join or form a Neighborhood Watch group through your local police department. Neighborhood Watch is an agreement between residents in a specific geographic area to watch out for each other's homes and safety, and to report any suspicious activities to the police department.

Procedures During a Robbery

By following certain guidelines, you can greatly increase your chances of surviving an encounter with a home invasion robber with minimal or no physical injury. Below are several suggestions for procedures you should be familiar with. These procedures will help reduce your risk of injury in many other types of violent encounters as well:

- Don't resist a robber. It's not worth risking your life for money or possessions. You can always buy more possessions, but you can't always survive the physical damage inflicted on your body.
- Avoid surprising the robber. A suspicious move may trigger a violent reaction, endangering your safety.

- Follow the robber's commands, but don't offer additional assistance. Give the robber exactly what he demands.
- Consider any firearms to be loaded, and assume that the robber is willing to use any weapons displayed or threatened.
- Be as observant as possible, without looking directly at the robber, which may be interpreted as a threat or challenge. Try to remember the robber's physical characteristics such as race, sex, age, height, weight, facial characteristics, scars, tattoos, speech patterns, clothing, etc. Try to remember how many robbers were present, descriptions of weapons shown, names used, or other peculiarities such as odor of alcohol. If a car is observed, try to remember specifics such as make, model, color, license plate state and number, and direction of travel.
- Being a good witness is the best way to help police solve a crime. Cooperate during the robbery, and when the robbers leave write down any details while they're still fresh in your memory. Call police and report the crime as soon as possible.

Procedures After the Robbery

Your actions after a robbery are often the key to providing police with the information they need to investigate the crime. Below are several suggestions for what to do if you've been victimized:

- Call the police immediately and report the crime. Provide information on the crime, injured persons, and identifying characteristics of the robbers and their vehicle, including direction of travel, and stay on the line with police until they tell you it's ok to hang up.
- Don't try to follow or chase the robbers. The robbers may attack you, and responding police may think you, too, are fleeing the scene.
- Give assistance to any injured parties until police or ambulance personnel arrive.
- Try to preserve potential evidence. Don't touch anything, including door knobs or items handled or dropped at the scene, and keep others from entering the area as well.
- Write down anything you remember about the crime, including descriptions of the robbers, vehicles used, and exact words spoken. Don't compare information with other witnesses. Independent observations are usually more helpful to police. Don't discuss the crime with anyone until police arrive and begin their investigation. Often, information compared with others is incorrect or inaccurate. Refer all questions to the police.
- Make a list of items found to be missing, including accurate descriptions of all items.

While not guaranteed to deter all incidents, by following the suggestions listed above, it is possible to reduce the risk of home invasion robberies, burglaries, and other targeted crimes, as well as increase your chances of surviving an encounter with a robber with minimal or no physical injury. Following these guidelines may also aid in catching the robbers and bringing them to justice.