

PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS

This section contains tips on personal security when you are at home and away from home in various situations. They are simple, common sense suggestions that will help keep you from being an easy target for a criminal. They include tips for parents, seniors, travelers, office and business employees, and babysitters. Also included are things to do if you are threatened or are a victim of stalking or domestic violence.

A. AT HOME

The following situations are considered: inside a home, answering the door, answering the phone and talking to strangers, returning home, and caring for your children.

1. Inside a Home, Apartment, or Condo

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you are at home or are just going out “for a minute.”
- Install dead-bolt locks on all doors.
- Don’t give maids, babysitters, or others working in your home access to your home keys or alarm codes.
- Re-key or change all locks when moving into a new home.
- List only your last name and initials on your mailbox or in a phone directory.
- Don’t give your name, phone number, or whereabouts on your answering machine message. Never say you aren’t home. Just ask the caller to leave a message.
- Consider installing a home alarm system that provides monitoring for burglary, fire, and medical emergencies.
- Leave outside lights on after dark or have outside lights controlled by a motion detector. Keep porches and all entrances well lighted. Check bulbs regularly.
- Keep drapes or blinds closed at night but leave some lights on.
- Leave drapes or blinds partially open during the day.
- Never dress in front of windows. Always close the drapes or blinds.
- Know your neighbors and keep their phone numbers handy.
- Have a friend or neighbor check on you daily if you are home alone.
- Try never to be alone in the laundry room or any other common area in an apartment building.
- Have government and other regular checks deposited directly in your bank.
- Call the SDPD CRO (Community Relations Officer) in your neighborhood to arrange for a free home security survey. And ask about starting or joining a Neighborhood Watch program in your area. SDPD area station addresses and phone numbers are listed at the end of this document along with the address and phone number of the SDPD storefront or satellite office in your area and contact person there.
- Call 911 if you hear or see something suspicious. Examples of suspicious activities are listed in Sec. VII below. Don’t take direct action yourself. An officer will be dispatched to your address even if you cannot speak or hang up.
- Plan an escape route from each room in your home to use in a fire, earthquake, break-in, or other emergency situation.

- Designate a safe room in your home that your family can retreat to and escape potential violence by home invasion robbers. Develop a home security plan for this contingency and make sure all family members know what to do.
- Arm your security system even when you are at home. And have panic alarm buttons installed around your home so they can be used in the event of a home invasion.
- Make sure your street address number is clearly visible from the street and is well lighted at night so the police and other emergency personnel can locate your home easily. Numbers should be at least 4 inches high must be used on individual dwellings and duplexes, and 12 inches high on multiple-unit residential buildings.
- Make sure your unit number (in a multifamily housing development) is clearly visible from paths in the development. A directory or map that shows paths and unit locations should be placed at the main entrance of the development.
- Call your local SDPD Area Station to request YANA (You Are Not Alone) visits to elderly persons or other shut-ins who should be checked on periodically.

2. Answering the Door

- Don't open your door at the sound of a knock or bell. Know who's at your door before opening it. Install a wide-angle peephole in your front door so you can look out without being seen yourself.
- Don't rely on chain locks for security. They're only good for privacy.
- Don't open the door to a delivery or service person unless you are expecting a package or a call. Ask for the person's name and the name and phone number of the company. Call it to confirm the visit. Keep the door closed and locked in the meantime.
- Check photo registration card before dealing with any solicitors, peddlers, interviewers, etc. These persons are required to obtain a card from the SDPD and display it on the front of their clothing. They are allowed to solicit only between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. except by appointment. Call their agency to verify their identity.
- Call the SDPD if a solicitor does not have a registration card. Use the non-emergency numbers, (619) 531-2000 or (858) 484-3154. And provide the dispatcher with a good description of the person.
- Post a NO SOLICITING sign if you don't want any solicitor to ring your door bell, knock on your door, or make any other sound to attract your attention.
- Ask for photo identification before letting in anyone you don't know. Check out the identification with the company or agency if you are suspicious.
- Never let a stranger enter your home to use the telephone. Offer to make the call yourself in an emergency.
- Consider getting a dog that will bark when someone is at the door.
- Call 911 if the person at the door is aggressive in knocking or ringing the doorbell, or is otherwise threatening.
- If you don't want to answer the door and don't want the person there to think that no one is home, say something like "We can't come to the door now," or "We don't open the door to strangers."

3. Answering the Phone and Talking to Strangers

- Never give your name or number to a person making a wrong-number phone call or to anyone you don't know.
- Hang up if you receive a threatening or harassing phone call. Call the SDPD if these calls are repeated. Use the non-emergency numbers, (619) 531-2000 or (858) 484-3154.

- Don't indicate you are home alone to anyone you don't know.
- Be suspicious of all solicitors, especially if the caller says you have won a prize but asks you to send money first, says you have to act right away, fails to identify the sponsor, uses a variation of an official or nationally-recognized name, e.g., Salvation League instead of Salvation Army, offers to have someone pick up a cash payment from your home, says he or she is a law enforcement officer who will help you for a fee, requires you to attend a sales meeting, directs you to dial a pay-per-call 900 number, delays the delivery of a product or prize, etc.
- Never give your credit card, checking account, Social Security number, or any personal information to an unknown caller. Just say "no" and hang up on anyone who asks for personal information. Don't ever assume a friendly voice belongs to a friend.
- Only give your personal information when you have initiated the call and are sure the other party is legitimate.
- Ask a charity to send written information about its finances and programs before making any commitments.
- Call the Better Business Bureau of San Diego County at (858) 496-2131 to check on any unsolicited offers. Or visit its website at www.sandiego.bbb.org for general consumer information and tips on avoiding various types of fraud.
- For additional information contact the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center at (877) 382-4357 and www.ftc.gov, Federal Communications Commission Consumer Center at (888) 225-5322 and www.fcc.gov/ccb/consumer_news/, and California Department of Consumer Affairs Consumer Information Center at (800) 952-5210 and www.dca.ca.gov/r_r/Telemark.pdf.

4. Returning Home

- Have the person driving you home wait until you are safely inside.
- Leave outside lights on if you'll return after dark.
- Don't overburden yourself with packages that obstruct your view and make it difficult to react in an emergency.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately.
- Don't go in or call out if you suspect someone has broken into your home, e.g., if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call 911.
- Go to a neighbor's house and call 911 if someone is following you on foot or in a vehicle. Or use your cell phone to call, but don't go home while the threat exists.
- Be aware of any people around your home when you return. Go to a neighbor's house if you have any concerns about your safety when opening the garage or other door.
- Keep your headlights on until you are in your garage at night.
- Close the garage door before getting out of your vehicle.

5. Caring for Your Children

- Know where your children are at all times. Make sure that they return home promptly at appointed times.
- Know what your children wear every day. Avoid putting their names on the outside of their clothes. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- Be aware of anyone who pays an unusual amount of interest in your children.
- Never leave your child alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place.

- Have your children play in a supervised area with friends you know.
- Establish a simple code word to be used if someone your child does not know comes to pick up him or her. Remind your child about the word periodically. Stress that this word must be kept secret.
- Walk your children to school and point out dangerous spots and safe places.
- Make sure that your child's school will not release your child to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you, and that the school will call you back to verify any call saying that designated person will come to pick up your child.
- Ask the school to notify you whenever your child is not in class.
- Let your children know where you will be at all times and how to get in touch with you.
- Keep a record of your children's friends and their phone numbers.
- Post a list of emergency phone numbers in your home.
- Keep an updated information file on your children. Include pictures, fingerprints, footprints, physical characteristics, identifying marks, medical and dental records, etc.
- Be careful in selecting persons to care for your children. Meet them and check their references.
- Don't leave your children with anyone they don't want to be with.
- Encourage your children to talk to you and listen to what they say. Never underestimate their fears or concerns.
- Keep the home computer in the family room, not in a child's bedroom. Children should not have separate sign-ons. Limit and monitor their use of the Internet.
- Never allow your children to go alone to meet someone they have "talked" to on line unless they actually know the person.
- Discuss these tips with your children and analyze situations in which they apply.

Teach your children:

- Their full name, address, and phone number.
- How to make phone calls within and outside your area code, use 911 and other emergency numbers, and reach an operator.
- How to use cellular and pay phones.
- Who they should call or go to in an emergency.
- The difference between a stranger who may be a danger and one who may be helpful. The simple "stranger-danger" message is inappropriate because the danger to children is much greater from someone who is not a stranger.
- Things a child abductor might say, e.g., "Can you help me find my dog?" or "Your mom's hurt and told me to come get you."
- To say NO and run away immediately if offered a ride by a stranger.
- Not to accept a ride or go anywhere with anyone who does not know the code word.
- Not to accept gifts or money from strangers, or let them take their picture. Have them tell you if anyone offers them gifts or money, or asks to take their picture or share a secret. Be alert for any new things they possess.
- The location of safe places away from home, especially on their routes to and from school, i.e., neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- To run to the nearest safe place if a person appears to be following you or if a vehicle slows or stops by you.
- Not to hitchhike.
- To avoid walking or playing alone, taking shortcuts, going near deserted or abandoned buildings, and other dangerous places.

- Not to go out alone at night.
- Not to wander away in a store. Go to the nearest clerk and ask for help if they become lost. Don't leave the store or hide.
- Not to open the door to a stranger or let an uninvited neighbor or acquaintance into your home. And not to even answer the door in some situations.
- Not to tell anyone on the phone that you are not at home. Have your child say you cannot come to the phone. Have him or her ask the caller to leave a message and say you will call back.
- Not to answer the phone if he or she cannot take a message.
- To check in with you after arriving home, and to check in with a neighbor if you are not at home.
- Not to enter their home if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway; go to a neighbor's home and call the police.
- To keep all doors and windows locked at home.
- All the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, door and window locks, outside lights, etc.
- How to get out of the home or building quickly in case of fire.
- Not to go into any else's home without permission.
- To tell you about things that frighten them or make them uncomfortable in any way. Show them that you are always concerned about their safety and security.
- Never to give out any personal information that can identify them.
- People they communicate with on the Internet are not necessarily who might seem to be. Never go alone to meet someone they have "talked" to on line unless they actually know the person.
- Trust their instincts. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't.