

Six Tips to Secure Your Home and Deter Burglars



When people think about burglary, they often think of elaborate movie plots. But most burglaries last less than 12 minutes and occur between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. in unoccupied homes. The typical burglar is not a professional criminal, but rather a male teenager who lives nearby.

There were nearly 2.2 million burglaries reported in 2009—or one every 14.3 seconds—resulting in \$4.6 billion of property loss. That's more than \$2,000 lost per burglary. Additionally, because burglars generally target empty homes, they may become startled and react violently if they find someone in the home, leaving residents at risk.

You should feel safe in your home whether you're there or not. Fortunately, there are

steps you can take to protect your home without breaking the bank, making it safer for you and less attractive to burglars trying to break in.

Reduce your risk of being victimized by burglars and protect your home by following the tips below.

1. Play defense and check your locks.

As your first line of defense, high quality locks deter many would-be burglars who want to enter and exit as quick and easy as possible. Every exterior door in your house should have a dead-bolt lock with a one-inch throw. For doors with key-in-the-knob locks, install an additional lock for added security against lock-picking.

It's important to lock secondary entrances that burglars would target, such as garage doors, backdoors, sliding glass doors and windows. Secure accessible windows with secondary blocking devices such as wooden dowels or sticks for horizontal sliding windows and through-the-frame pins for vertical sliding windows. Most importantly, lock up

when you leave the house. An unlocked door or open window is an invitation for thieves.

If you've just moved into a new house or apartment or recently lost your keys, rekey the locks as soon as possible. There's no telling who may have a duplicate of the old keys. And don't hide keys in mailboxes or under doormats because that's where most thieves will look. Instead, give a duplicate key to a trusted neighbor or relative.

2. Invest in doors worth locking.

Strong locks don't help if your doors are faulty. Replace old, flimsy doors to ensure that your home is fully protected. All outside doors, including the one between



your house and the garage, should be made of solid

metal or hard wood and at least 1.75 inches thick. Your doors should fit tightly in their frames, and their hinges should be on the inside to make it more difficult for a burglars to break in.

Kicking in the door is the most common form of forced entry. But if you upgrade to a four-screw, heavy-duty, high security strike plate in place of a wooden jamb, you can prevent most forced entries. Install a peephole or wide-angle viewer in all entry doors rather than a short chain because it allows you to see outside without opening the door. Finally, take a few minutes to teach your children about home safety and explain the house rules about answering the door and the telephone.

3. Think like a burglar.

Many people don't identify their home's vulnerabilities until it's too late. One of the best methods of prevention is to look at your house from the outside as if you were a burglar trying to break in. Ask yourself:

Are there any trees, bushes or shrubs that could easily shield a burglar from view?

Trim overgrown areas, including tree limbs that could be used to gain easy access into a second-story window.



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Are your house and yard brightly lit?

Outside, make sure any porch area and entrance is well lit. Inside, put lights and radios on timers to create the illusion that someone is home. If the entrances to your home are dark, consider



installing lights with an infrared detector. Most burglars

don't want to be observed as they approach the door.

Is there an easy way to get inside?

Open/unlocked windows and doors are an obvious red flag, but resourceful burglars may also use tools left in the yard to assist in a break-in.

4. Learn about alarm systems.

Whether you live in an isolated area, a neighborhood with a high crime rate or you simply want peace of mind, you should explore the potential benefits of a home security alarm system. Installing an alarm system is an investment, but if you take the time to research your options, it's

also one of the best ways to secure your home.

There are many types of alarm systems available. The most important thing is that they need to have an audible horn or bell to be effective and alert the burglar that they've been detected. Some systems are monitored 24/7 by a central authority that immediately alerts the police when a burglar is detected. Be sure to research a company before you sign a contract and agree to go with its security system.

If you choose to invest in an alarm system, ensure that it is installed correctly and test it periodically. Clearly marked decals that indicate your house is protected by a security system are a great deterrent against would-be burglars who don't want the added risk of being caught and arrested. Lastly, remember to keep your alarm response call list updated so you can be reached in the event of an intrusion.

5. Know your neighbors.

Whether you're new in town or a longtime resident, neighbors are a valuable resource. If you don't already know your neighbors, take a few minutes to introduce yourself to the people who live nearby. The watchful eye of a good neighbor can be the best defense against potential burglars.

Once you meet a good neighbor that you can trust, rely on that neighbor to store



an extra key at his or her place and keep an eye on your place when you're not around, reporting any suspicious persons or activity.

Whether you do something big like organizing a Neighborhood Watch, or something small like volunteering to pick up a neighbor's newspaper and mail when they're on vacation, establishing a good rapport with neighbors goes a long way toward keeping your home and neighborhood safe.

6. Get a game plan.

Most of the tips you've read have dealt with prevention. But what if a burglar manages to get inside while you or a family member is at home? Sit down with your family and talk about this scenario. Go over the game plan so that everyone knows what to do if a burglar breaks into the house.

Your ultimate goal is to avoid confronting the burglar face to face because that could startle them and lead to a physical encounter.

Teach everyone in your family not to investigate strange noises, but to instead quietly tell you or call the police. If they're alone, tell them to lock the bedroom door and call 911. If they wake up and find a stranger in the room, tell them to pretend to be asleep until the intruder has left and then notify you or call the police. If they find a door ajar or a smashed window when they get home, tell them not to go inside. Instead, go to a pre-determined neighbor's house and contact the authorities.