

Limit your vulnerability of these common crimes.

All too often, crimes are committed based on opportunity. By this we mean that if you take some simple precautions this may limit the possibility that you become the victim of some crimes. Some of these crimes include but are not limited to: fraud, theft, breaking and entering (B&E), scams, identity theft, bullying, etc.

A huge problem that seems to plague everywhere are daytime breaks into homes and nighttime breaks into vehicles. These events seem to happen in cycles and usually involve groups of people working together to target certain areas. Although the law enforcement community has networks to identify trends and try to identify the individuals involved in these groups, there are many people whom are victimized by these intrusive criminals. A vigilant citizen who sees something that just doesn't seem right and reports what they see to the police are usually the reasons for these criminals getting caught. These criminals usually want to avoid any physical confrontation and so they target the homes during the day and vehicles at night.

For those of you who have been the victim of a B&E, whether it is your home during the daytime, or your vehicle at night, it is a very violating experience. To have someone enter your personal space where you should feel 100% safe, to rummage through your personal property, take whatever they like, break and destroy anything, without any regard for you and your family, has to be one of the most personally violating crimes that occurs. These criminals do not hesitate to steal your car, pocketbook, heirloom jewelry, computers, TVs, Christmas presents and anything else of any value without any regard.

Another group of common crimes involve scams and identity theft. Everyday criminals both domestic and abroad target innocent citizens and steal their identity or rope them into a seemingly great deal. A simple rule of thumb that we need to pay attention too is- if it seems to good to be true, then it probably is. These predators will try anything to make you either feel really bad for them with a very absorbing story, or will offer you what seems to be the deal of a lifetime. They will victimize anyone and make every effort to make their pitch seem as real as possible. Some of these scams include: paving and home improvement, giving you a check for a large sum of money and only asking for a portion of it back, vacation offers, email offers, stories of children and veterans with an illness or hardship and many many more sneaky and very believable stories and proposals.

With regards to the identity theft, we live in the information technology era where our personal information is both electronically and physically tracked by stores, bank organizations, and medical services to name a few. It's critical that you be vigilant in protecting yourself, your children, elderly relatives and others from these very corrosive crimes. It costs victims incredible amounts of money, debt, credit status and lots of time and aggravation in tracking and repairing the destructive path of identity theft.

The final common area that we can try to limit vulnerability in, are bullying and harassment. These topics have been the spotlight of recent stories and destruction among us in recent years due to the introduction of new technology. The ever-increasing popularity of texting, email, digital images, video and social networking are a major part of these problems.

It's very easy for people, usually school age kids, to harass and bully people around them whether it is just for fun, or to get back at someone for whatever reason. It's very easy for someone's reputation to be compromised by photos, videos, and statements that are made by people hiding behind the technology. What used to be a personal confrontation face to face is now a very easy non confrontational comment or photo posted on facebook or texted for lots of people to see and share with their friends. These easy posts or texts can destroy someone's youth, career, family, and reputation beyond easy repair. To some this technology has been the underlying reason for drug and alcohol use, relationship issues, school dropouts, aggression, depression and some suicides. It's important for people to know and understand the possible negative impacts of this every increasing and developing technology.

Below you will find some thoughts and tips to help you, your family and friends to limit your vulnerability in becoming the next victim of these crimes.

Identity Theft

- If you go on vacation- place a hold on mail and news papers or have a neighbor pick them up
- Deposit outgoing mail in a secure mail box
- Never give personal information such as social security numbers, dates of birth, credit card numbers, mothers maiden name, bank pin numbers etc. unless you initiate the call
- Shred old bills, pre approved credit card mail, statements, medical documents etc.
- Check your credit report annually for discrepancies and fraudulent activity
- Memorize your social security number and pin numbers, don't write them down
- Never loan your credit card to anyone
- Report stolen or lost credit cards immediately.

Home Security Tips

- Always lock your doors! Unlocked doors are an easy target for perpetrators
- Always lock or secure your windows. If you have an AC unit, block the top of the window so that it can not be opened any further and secure the AC unit to the window
- Lock and or secure all garage, shed and basement doors.
- Secure sliding patio doors with a dowel or piece of wood to prevent it from opening
- Don't hide extra keys in common areas. Everyone knows to look for the rock or doormat.
- Secure ladders or other means of access to second floor windows.
- House numbers should be clearly visible and bright. This is for law enforcement, fire or medical persons responding to a call.
- Use motion sensors to illuminate around your home and night.
- Don't leave notes indicating that your not home, or when you will return.
- Never leave a name or address on your keys
- Don't allow unknown people into your home for any reason. Public utilities will notify you in advance prior to needing to enter your home to conduct an inspection or maintenance.
- Photograph and record serial numbers and appraisals of jewelry, electronics and other valuables

- Keep a backup of digital photos on an external hard drive.
- Photograph and video tape your home and its contents and secure copies of your personal information out side of the home, i.e. a friend, relative, safety deposit box etc.
- Don't leave bicycles, yard tools and other valuables unsecured in your yard
- Never enter your home if you come home to a suspected B&E
- Be a good neighbor. Call the police if you see anything suspicious and don't hesitate.

Vehicle Security

- Always lock your vehicle.
- Never leave it running and unattended
- Don't leave your keys in your car
- Do not leave valuables in the vehicle, if you have to don't leave them in plain view
- Remove and secure radio faceplates
- Lock truck caps and tool boxes
- Memorize your license plate number
- Don't leave loose change, money or a wallet in the open
- Don't leave your keys in the "community key bin" at the gym

Don't be the victim of a scam

- If it seems too good to be true, it probably is
- Emails, telephone calls, and mailings advertising great offers, free checks to cash, " I'll give you a check for \$5000 and you give me \$1000 cash" Don't fall for it
- Use caution with online sales like ebay and Craig's List
- Don't let people fill the holes or skim coat your driveway
- Be aware of door to door initiated home repair people
- Be cautious of who you donate money too via the mail or telephone
- Be cautious of stories of hardship or sickness of strangers.
- Before you donate money, cash that check or get the work done on your home, run it past a friend or family member. If you're still unsure, call the Police Department for advice.

Social Network and Technology Safety

- Don't allow kids in middle school or younger to have a social network account
- Banning a high school student from the sites probably won't work so education and monitoring site postings, comments, information, photos etc is necessary
- Once it's on the web you can't delete it. Assume that it will be out there forever
- Use security settings to limit access to your information, photos and postings to people you know.
- Don't meet strangers from the Internet. This is more so for kids. Unfortunately criminals sometimes target a child's innocence.
- Parents need to keep a finger on the pulse of the changing technology and their children's use of it.
- Educate yourself and children on sexting and the consequences of this increasingly popular teenage involvement

- Don't flirt with strangers, you never really know who your dealing with
- Communicate with you kids and address any possible bullying concerns or in appropriate actions or activity immediately.
- Familiarize yourself with your child's friend list. Don't accept friends who you don't know.