



## CRIME PREVENTION

*“I used to be too scared to leave my apartment because I was afraid of being robbed. Then I heard a crime prevention officer give suggestions on safety. Now I feel less vulnerable and more confident when I go outside.”*

– Nancy, 81-year-old widow

Frightened by the possibility of becoming a crime victim, many older people choose to stay at home, going out only when necessary. This fear often impacts on their quality of life, limiting social contacts and increasing social isolation. Interestingly, people over age 65 are victims of violent crimes like physical attack or murder *far less* frequently than are young people. However, older adults are more vulnerable to certain crimes, like purse snatching or fraud. Becoming aware of these kinds of crime facts and being careful and alert can reduce opportunities for criminals to strike. Frequent contact with neighbors also helps create a sense of security and support. When community residents take responsibility for crime prevention, individuals and neighborhoods become safer.

### How Can I Protect Myself When I Go Out?

- If you must carry a purse, hold it close to your body. Don't dangle it from an extended arm or hand.
- Never carry a wallet in your back pocket. Put it in an inside jacket pocket or front pocket.
- If possible, make sure someone knows where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Avoid dark, deserted routes, even if they are the shortest.
- Carry change for emergency telephone and transportation use.
- Whenever possible, travel with friends to stores, the bank, or the doctor. Check with your police or sheriff or with your senior citizen center about escort services.
- When using the bus or other public transportation, sit near the driver, if possible.
- Don't overburden yourself with packages and groceries that may obstruct your view and make it hard for you to react.
- Have your car or house key in hand as you approach your vehicle or home.

- Carry a shriek alarm. In some areas, community groups offer free alarms to seniors.
- When you drive, keep doors locked and windows rolled up. Park in well-lighted, busy areas. If you have car trouble, be wary of strangers who offer help. Stay in your car and ask them to call a service truck or the police. It can be reassuring to travel with a cell phone so that you can call for help in an emergency.
- If a friend or a taxi takes you home, ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside.
- Communicate the message that you are calm, confident, and know where you are going. Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in a place or situation, leave.

## How Can I Protect Myself at Home?

- Use deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Keep your doors locked at all times, even when you are inside.
- Protect windows and sliding glass doors with good locks or other security devices.
- Make your home appear occupied when you go out by using a timer to turn on lights and a radio.
- Never let strangers in your home without checking their identification. Call the company they are representing if you're not sure. Install a peephole in your door and use it.
- If you live alone, don't advertise it. Instead of listing your first name, use only your first initial in phone books, directories, apartment lobbies, and on mailboxes.
- Get to know your neighbors and keep their phone numbers handy for emergencies.
- Work out a "buddy" system with a friend to check on each other daily.
- Keep bonds, stock certificates, seldom-worn jewelry, and stamp and coin collections in a safe deposit box.
- Don't hide extra house keys under a doormat or other obvious spots.

## How Can I Protect My Money?

- If you receive checks regularly in the mail, arrange for them to be sent directly to the bank instead.
- Avoid carrying large sums of money. If you must take a large sum to the bank or somewhere else, have a friend accompany you.

- Don't display large amounts of cash in stores or other public places.
- Never put your purse or wallet on a counter while you examine merchandise in a store.

## What if I Am Assaulted?

- Don't resist if the attacker is only after your purse or other valuables. Your life and safety are worth more than your possessions.
- Make a conscious effort to get an accurate description of the attacker and call the police or sheriff immediately.
- Remember, even the most careful person is unable to prevent all crimes.
- Understand that what the person did to you was wrong and not your fault. Remember, in addition to physical injury or financial loss, it is not unusual to feel overwhelmed, frightened, devastated, or in emotional pain after being a crime victim.
- Contact your local victim assistance agency as soon as possible. The agency can help you deal with the trauma crime victims often experience and to provide or make appropriate referrals for other services that may be needed, like legal, compensation, or medical assistance.

## How Can I Avoid Being Conned?

Older persons are much more likely than any other age group to become victims of fraudulent schemes. Anyone can be a victim – even people who consider themselves too smart or sophisticated. Con artists target older people because they believe older persons are trusting, polite to strangers, and willing to engage in conversation, thus allowing an opportunity to be “pressured” into doing something. Be especially wary of the following:

- “Get rich quick” schemes in which you have to put up “good faith” money
- “Good deals” on expensive repair or home improvement jobs.
- Investments that promise unusually large returns
- Someone claiming that you owe money for an item ordered by a deceased spouse or relative
- Work-at-home schemes, door-to-door sales, supplemental Medicare insurance, miracle cures, or glasses and hearing aids at bargain prices
- Any proposal involving money, credit cards, banking, or valuables that sounds too good to be true or that must be kept secret. Don't

rush into any kind of agreement or contract. Check it out with friends, lawyers, the police department, Better Business Bureau, crime prevention and victim assistance programs, and your state or county consumer affairs department.

*Remember: If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!*

If you are the victim of fraud, call the police immediately. You may feel some embarrassment because you were tricked, but your information is vital in catching the con artist and preventing others from being victimized.

Having a sound financial plan in place helps ensure that your assets are protected, which will make you less anxious about your finances and, hopefully, less vulnerable to fraudulent schemes.

## What Can I Do To Make My Neighborhood Safe?

Staying active in your community will help you feel safer and will also help make your neighborhood a better place in which to live. Here are some ideas for you to consider:

- Join a Neighborhood, Apartment, Window Watch, or Citizen Patrol. Contact your local police and ask them for the name of a community watch group in your area.
- If a friend has been a victim of crime, be supportive. For example, listen carefully and non-judgmentally, cook a meal for him or her, help repair damage or replace belongings. If possible, offer to accompany the victim to the police station and to court.
- Ask the crime prevention officer from your local law enforcement agency to talk to any group you belong to that has older members.

## Where to Get Help

### National Resources

**Federal Bureau of Investigation.** This national agency has a division targeting fraud against senior citizens and offers information about fraudulent schemes involving health insurance, counterfeit prescription drugs, funeral and cemetery and telemarketing fraud, and much more. Web site: [www.fbi.gov/majcases/fraud/seniorsfam.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/majcases/fraud/seniorsfam.htm)

**National Organization for Victims Assistance (NOVA).** This private non-profit organization provides information for crime victims, regardless of age, on a wide range of topics, including what to do before and after a crime, types of crimes that can happen, victim rights and compensation, victim assistance programs, and physical and emotional reactions to being a victim. Call its **National Crime Victims Information and Referral Hotline** to find a community-based victims' assistance program near you.

Phone: 800-879-6682.

Web site: <http://www.trynova.org/victiminfo/victimizationhelp>

## **New York State Resources**

**New York State Crime Victims Board.** This agency's mission is to provide financial compensation to innocent victims of crime and to advocate for the rights and benefits of all innocent victims of crime.

Phone: 1-800-247-8035 or 718-923-4325. Web site: [www.cvb.state.ny.us](http://www.cvb.state.ny.us)

## **New York City Resources**

**Citizens for NYC.** This nonprofit organization helps people find or begin a neighborhood volunteer watch group.

Phone: 1-212-989-0909. Web site: [www.citizensnyc.org](http://www.citizensnyc.org)

**CornellCARES.com** Developed and maintained by Weill Medical College of Cornell University's Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology, this Web site provides an easily accessible Web-based directory of NYC Medicare mental health providers. Some providers specialize in treating crime victims and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Web site: [www.CornellCARES.com](http://www.CornellCARES.com).

## **New York City Department for the Aging**

- ***Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center*** helps elderly victims of crime and offers prevention counseling as well as assistance with victims of elder abuse. Phone: 1-212-442-3103 or 1-212-442-1000. Web site: [www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov)
- ***“Taking Care of Business: Protecting Yourself and Your Assets”*** is a guide intended to help protect older people from becoming victims of financial exploitation. Web site: [www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/pdf/dfta\\_tcb.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/pdf/dfta_tcb.pdf)

**Safe Horizons.** This nonprofit victim assistance agency provides support for victims including emergency shelters, lock repairs, safety planning, crisis counseling, legal assistance, and referrals. If you are victimized, call the hotline, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Crime Victims Hotline: 1-866-689-4357.

Phone: 1-212-577-7777. Web site: [www.safehorizons.org](http://www.safehorizons.org)

*The material in this handout has been adapted with permission from the The National Crime Prevention Council, 1000 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036*

*This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions you receive from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider.*

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