

How to Guard Your Family Against Crime



PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ROSE

This is National Crime Prevention
Week, a good time to learn
how you can avoid innocently aiding
and abetting some crook

By PETER J. PITCHESS

Sheriff of Los Angeles County

as told to Patricia and Ron Deutsch



CRIME, like disease, can be prevented.

Most crimes are spur-of-the-moment things. The criminal watches for an opportunity and strikes quickly. If you know what he is looking for, you can often remove that opportunity—and prevent the crime.

For example, in a very large percentage of the car-theft cases in Los Angeles County last year, the keys had been left in the ignition. In many other cases, doors were left temptingly open.

Locking your car doesn't mean you are safe from theft, but a thief is more likely to pass up a locked car for an easier mark.

Much of the same is true of most other criminal acts against American families. You should learn how your family is vulnerable to crime—and how you can reduce the vulnerability.

Many shoppers, for example, leave valuable items lying on the back seats of unlocked cars. Never leave such property in view. Lock it in the trunk. No thief will jimmy a trunk unless he knows there is a real prize inside. It takes a crowbar, and the ensuing scene is an attention-getter.

At home, your garage is especially vulnerable, since it is full of nice pawnables. In most garage thefts last year, the door was wide open. Also, many a mower, bike, or power tool was left temptingly outside.

Keep things under cover. And lock your garage. Sure, the lock can be picked. But why should a thief bother when some kindly soul will make it all so much simpler by being careless? Another precaution you can take is to *know* what you own. Keep a simple list of valuables—cars, cameras, mowers, appliances—with their make, color, model, year, registration, and engine numbers. Then we police know just what we're looking for. The article may go through several hands before we catch up to it, and we must prove it's yours.

Any experienced thief can get into your house. But you can take steps to discourage him from trying—not only with locks but with light.

BURGLARS usually strike in the dark hours. They are nervous. And light makes them feel they may be watched. That's why my office started a "burn-a-light-at-night" program.

For a penny or two, you can burn a light *all* night. Where? At least one inside and one out. Unless the thief knows you have a Rembrandt inside, he'll probably hunt a darker corner.

Keep your privacy, too, and that of your neighbors. Americans rarely demand identification before they ask an "insurance inspector" in or give a "credit checker" a rundown on the living habits of the people next door.

Think how much anyone can learn from such questions. And think before you publicize your vacation trip, your new mink, or the fact you're never home at noon. The good thief is eager to know.

If you leave home for a trip, let the police know. Get someone to pick up mail, newspapers, and throw-aways. Leave a light burning.

What about the woman home alone? Her best protection is in light and drawn shades, together with wholesome suspicion of callers. But there are two other important defenses—a telephone by the bed and a dog. Remember, it's the bark, not the size, that counts in a dog. A small yippy dog can wake a neighborhood, and criminals hate noise.

As for the telephone, don't hesitate to call us. The prowler you see about your house may be a man the police are hunting.

Late at night, people should walk where there is light. If you think you are being followed, just pound on the nearest door. (It's amazing how few people will do this.) If a threat comes close, yell!

In our schools, our officers now teach children to refuse candy, gifts, rides, and attentions from strangers—especially in movies or when they are alone. But there are things we'd like to teach parents as well. And the first is: *know where your children are.*

Know when school is out, where Johnny will be playing, and what time he'll be home for supper. Then *enforce* those times. Insist that Johnny phone you if he is late for any reason. You'd be shocked to know how many missing-child reports we get *hours* late.

A threat to safety is as much our business as the accomplished criminal act. Only you can tell us of that threat. If we don't know the dangers, we can't do our job of protecting you.