

Community Safety

Fear of crime in our villages

Fear of crime is recognised as being as serious a problem as the crime itself because of the impact on people's quality of life. In some cases the dramatic coverage in the press can often lead to an increase in fear, particularly where crimes against elderly people are concerned.

The reality is that the most vulnerable age group and gender are 18-24 year old men and, contrary to the portrayal in the press, the elderly are not high on the vulnerability list. That is particularly the case in rural areas such as our own. In these villages crimes occur infrequently but our very good communications network helps to spread the knowledge of those crimes very quickly. A good communications network can be beneficial most of the time, but in the case of crime can sometimes contribute to an increased level of fear. The fact is that in Somerset you have a much smaller chance of becoming a victim than other parts of the country. The police, working together with their partners, are ensuring that our communities are becoming safer.

What can make a difference both in preventing crime itself and improving the feeling of security and confidence is good basic crime prevention. If you feel that you and your property are secure, then the fear of becoming a victim diminishes. Remember that crime in these areas is still, fortunately, a rare occurrence. Even when it occurs it is usually against property not the person.

How secure is my home?

Assess how secure your home is from the possibility of burglary and use some of the simple steps suggested to make your home safer.

Research shows that burglars are less likely to try and get into a secure home - they will, where possible, move on to a home that has fewer security precautions.

Doors - Remember, your doors and windows are a main access point for intruders. Increasing the security at these points will help add to the time a burglar will need to gain entry. Always lock your doors and make sure they are in good condition.

Are your front and back doors strong and safe?

Always lock your door - even if you are only leaving your house for a short while. Look at your doors - are they securely fixed to the wall and in good condition? If not, good locks are useless.

If your door is not in good condition, replace it when you can with a door which is at least 44 millimetres thick. This will allow for a mortise lock to be fitted. In the meantime, if your door is thinner than 44 millimetres, you can fit a rim deadlock. If you do not have a mortise deadlock on exterior doors your home may be vulnerable - good locks are vital to putting burglars off.

Don't forget, it's a waste of time fitting door security if you don't use it when you leave the house.

Are the frames of your doors in good condition?

The doorframe should be as strong as the door. Is the frame coming away from the wall, or does it look fragile? There is no point in having a strong front door and lock if the frame is held on by one screw. Make sure that the frame is securely fitted using strong screws or bolts.

Secure connecting door between your garage and house

Ideally all external doors including any doors from the garage to the house should have three points of resistance - the top, middle and bottom of the door. Make sure your garage is always locked, especially if it has a connecting door to the house. A burglar could get in and work on the inner door without being seen.

Exterior doors should have a mortise deadlock

If you do not have a mortise deadlock on exterior doors your home may be vulnerable – good locks are vital to putting burglars off. Mortise deadlocks should conform to BS3621 or the new BS EN 12209 standards. Hinge bolts would be recommended for outward swinging doors. They should be located 100 to 150 millimetres below the top and bottom hinges.

Fit locks to french windows and patio doors

French doors should be fitted with either mortise rack bolts (bolts fitted within the door and operated internally by a threaded key) or surface-mounted locking bolts (push to lock, key to open). Make sure they are rigid on installation.

Patio doors are a common means of entry and therefore, unless the doors are fitted with a multi-locking system, it is best to fit extra locks. Some patio doors can be lifted off their track. If you can lift it more than six millimetres (1/4 inch) simply screw wood blocks of a suitable depth into the channel above the opening door in order to prevent this.

Do you have a door viewer fitted?

Door viewers help you to see who is at the front door before you open it. They are especially useful for vulnerable groups such as older people.

Is the letterbox a good distance from your door lock?

Do not have letterboxes positioned near locks - a burglar could slip their hand through and open it.

Windows – It is essential that the windows in your home are as secure as you can possibly make them. Any weakness in the frame or lock can be exploited by a burglar as they try to gain access to your property.

Fit window locks - and use them - A good lock will delay and deter a burglar. If you don't have locks or if you don't use them, you should install them and start using them as soon as you can.

There are a variety of locks available to fit all windows - whether wood, metal or PVC framed. Make sure the lock is fitted correctly and in a position where it will have the most effect.

If burglars can see window locks it may serve to put them off because the noise of breaking glass would attract attention.

If you have, or plan to use the type of lock that screws to the window, the following test is a good guide to help decide how many are required. With the window closed, press each opening corner - if there is any movement, fit a suitable lock, such as a push lock, at each corner on the opening side. If there is no movement, a lock fitted to the centre of the opening frame will suffice.

Are your window frames in good condition? Make sure that window frames are well maintained and in a good condition.

Are downstairs windows screened by foliage or fences? High fences, walls and hedges will provide a sound degree of security to your home as they prevent burglars from viewing through the downstairs windows.

Exterior Security - Good security begins on the outside - with very simple measures that will delay or put a burglar off. Close gates and make them secure, lock the garage, tend hedges or fences and fit a burglar alarm if you can.

Does your house look secure?

The outside of your home is the first level of assessment for a burglar - make it look secure. A home that looks well cared for will seem more difficult to break into - try tidying the garden or repainting window frames.

Thorn bushes and gravel driveways help to deter burglars.

Hedges, shrubs and walls in the front garden should be no higher than one metre or three feet, in order to avoid giving a burglar a screen behind which they can hide. Thorny bushes can be planted on the perimeter and below ground floor windows to deter burglars.

The use of gravel on paths or driveways prevents a silent approach and can alert the occupier to someone's presence.

Have a secure fence at the back of your home

Not having a secure fence at the back of your home can present opportunity to a burglar. Low hedges or fences at the front give maximum visibility while high fences or walls at the back provide good security.

Does your garage door have strong locks?

Garages and sheds are targeted as an easy option, fit strong padlocks to the doors. Alternatively, alarms can be fitted to both, and can even be wired into the existing house alarm. Remember that leaving garden tools lying around makes the burglar's life easy - they should always be locked away securely in a shed or garage. If you have ladders, they should be secured with a chain or padlock to a strong post or wall.

Burglar alarm should be clearly visible outside the house. If you can, install a burglar alarm - opportunist burglars tend to avoid houses where they can see one - and your insurance premium may also be reduced.

Make sure you have good exterior lighting outside your home - Throw some light on the subject - good lighting is an essential deterrent. Make sure you have constant lighting at the front and security lights at the rear. Make sure that the lighting at the exterior of your home is adequate - if you feel it isn't - change it now.

Even if you are out pretend you are at home - leave lights on in the evenings when you go out to give the impression that there is someone home. Light sensitive switches or timers are effective if nobody is going to be at the house for a period of time.

Don't give burglars access to your roof - Don't make it easy for a burglar to access an upstairs window - make sure any trellising or gazebos don't provide an access point to upstairs windows for burglars.

Valuables - Many people by way of habit will leave valuables sitting in easy view and reach of the front or rear door of their property. Protect your valuables by storing them securely out of sight and keep a list of items which are of high monetary or sentimental value.

Timer lights can make it look like someone is home - Always try to make it look as if you are home - either by using timers on your lights or asking a friend or neighbour to open and close the curtains for you. These are simple, inexpensive steps to putting burglars off.

Make a list of the valuable items in your home - You should always have a list of items of both monetary and sentimental value for insurance purposes.

Keep photographs of these items - Take photographs of items with monetary or sentimental value as it can prove invaluable in helping police investigate a burglary. These photographs should be stored in a safe place.

Are your valuables kept hidden from view in the home? Lock them away. Most burglars are attracted by items that are easy to carry - cash, jewellery, small electrical items are all popular. Hide these items from view - the burglar will have to take time to find them.

Mark your valuables permanently with your postcode - Thieves like portable, high value, easily saleable goods like televisions, DVDs, computers, cameras, jewellery, silverware or antiques. These items should all be marked with your postcode followed by the number of your house. Use either an ultraviolet pen or marker.

Don't leave car keys on the hall table at night - Keep all valuables, such as wallets, purses, watches, jewellery - out of view when going to bed. - this is the same for car keys. Do not leave them in view, don't leave them near front or back doors, instead find a secure place to store them.

Don't leave valuables close to the door - Remember - make it difficult for burglars, don't leave your handbag or electronic equipment on view in a place that's easy to access. Draw curtains and blinds. Additionally small security safes can be relatively inexpensive and can be hidden and secured out of sight.

Shed Security

Sheds are often seen as an easy target for criminals– they are frequently left unlocked and in a poor state of repair.

Ensure your shed is kept in good condition and fit good physical security. A lighting system that covers the area of the shed can deter criminals.

Most shed doors open outwards with the hinges exposed. To prevent these from being removed to gain access replace the screws with dome head coach bolts.

Most thieves gain entry by forcing off the lock. Use a heavy-duty hasp and staple (also known as a pad bar) and secure it with suitable coach bolts and locking nuts

The padlock needs to be a good quality hardened steel of the close shackle type to prevent it from being cut off.

Fit metal grills to windows and secure by screwing into metal plates inside the shed

Prevent the thieves from window shopping by boarding the windows over on the inside or fit net curtains.

Fit a shed alarm to the door of your shed to warn of any attempted break in

Security mark as many items as possible with your postcode and house number or first two letters of your house name.

Consider using brightly coloured paint to mark your property to enable it to be identified from a distance.

Gardening tools and sports equipment are not cheap but can be sold on easily by thieves.

Chain valuable items together and secure to a fixed solid anchor point.

If you do keep valuable items such as cycles, fishing tackle and golf clubs in your shed ensure that they are adequately covered by your insurance policy.

Take photographs of any valuable items. They can be used to identify stolen property.