

Home security

Protecting your
property



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About this guide

We all want to feel that our home is secure from intruders. While burglary isn't very common, it's only sensible to take precautions. It doesn't take long to check for security risks.

This guide looks at simple and effective ways you can improve your home security to avoid burglary and other crimes around the home. It also outlines where you can get help to keep your property safe and what to do if your home is broken into.

Burglars look for easy opportunities to enter a home, so having security measures in place can often deter them. Just a few steps can make a big difference and give you peace of mind.

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.

In this guide, you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or visiting independentage.org/publications.

Think like a burglar

1

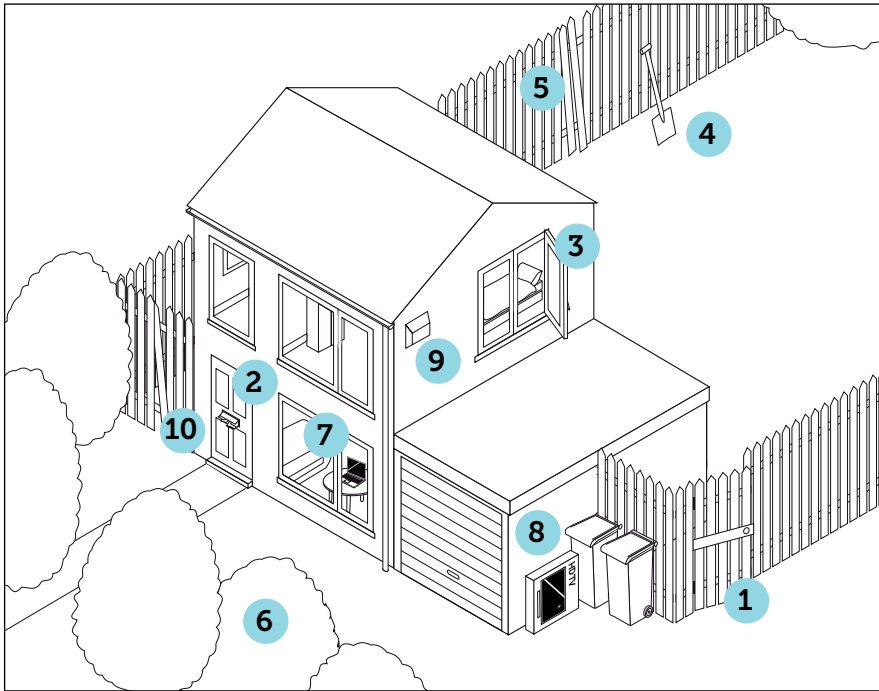
Take a look at this picture and see if you can identify the security risks:



A little knowledge can help you stay one step ahead of potential intruders. Many burglaries are not pre-planned and may be over in minutes. A burglar looks for easy access and quick results.

Burglars will look for:

- an open gate – if you're careless about this, the chances are the rest of your security is weak
- flimsy doors and inadequate locks
- open windows or other openings – even a small gap can be made bigger with an arm or a tool
- ways to get inside – ladders left out, garden furniture, tools that can be used to break in
- broken fences
- hiding places – overgrown hedges, poorly lit areas
- valuables that can be seen through the windows
- packaging for expensive items and wheelie bins left outside
- inactive alarms – they may test them by breaking a window or throwing something through a letterbox
- signs that nobody is home – a stuffed letterbox, mail on the doormat, closed curtains during the day, no lights on at night.



Burglars are put off by:

- lights
- strong locks
- double glazing or glass that's difficult to break
- Neighbourhood Watch
(0116 402 6111, ourwatch.org.uk)
- good working alarms.

You can make life difficult for burglars. There are many simple but effective solutions to improve your home security.

Checklist of things to think about

What would a burglar see if they looked at your home? Take some time to walk round your home and use this checklist to think about how secure the doors and windows are, and identify any other potential issues. Any box you tick could be a security risk. If you need help with this, ask your family or friends – or see our suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Take a good look at your home from the street:

- Are there bushes, shrubs or walls that could hide someone trying to get in?
- Is it hard to see the front door and the windows? Would an intruder be able to stay hidden?
- Does the house look like it's not been looked after?
- Do the doors look weak and flimsy?
- Do you lack any outside lighting that's triggered by movement or comes on automatically?

Now walk around the outside of your home:

- Are there any gaps or holes in the boundary?
- Are there any places that someone could climb over?
- Are there any hiding places?
- Are the side and rear entrances easy to access?

Now take a closer look at the property itself:

- Have you hidden spare keys somewhere that they could be found?
- Is there a door or window that is always open or easy to open?
- Would you be able to get in easily without being seen or making a noise?
- Are there any drainpipes that could be climbed?
- Is there a flat roof that would give access to other windows?
- Are there any climbing aids, such as a ladder, wheelie bins or trees?
- Is there anything a burglar could use to break a window?

If possible, look again when it gets dark.

Now look at the doors and entrances to your home:

- Are the doorframes flimsy and in poor condition?
- Could somebody easily kick in or break the door panels?
- Are the door hinges rusty or damaged, or could they be unscrewed?
- Is there only one lock on the front door?
- Can you see inside the hall through a window and/or the letterbox?
- Can you get your hand through the letterbox and reach the door locks?
- Can your patio door (if you have one) be lifted out of the frame?

Now look at the windows, especially ground-floor windows or any that are accessible from a flat roof.

Don't forget to check any French windows, garage and shed windows as well:

- Are the frames in poor condition?
- Are there any gaps between the frame and the building?
- Is the glass poorly fitted?
- Is the glass cracked?
- Is the putty or sealant in poor condition?
- Are your window locks hidden from view?

If you've ticked any of the boxes above, make an action plan to tackle them. For example:

Security issue	Action plan	Done
Rear security light burned out	Buy and replace bulb	✓
Only one working lock on front door	Contact locksmith to fix or replace second lock	

If your budget is limited, focus on doors, locks, windows, and possibly a small safe for your valuables. You can find ideas and tips for improving your home security in later chapters.

Getting help

You can get practical crime prevention advice on the Police.uk website, where you can also find information about your local force and what support you can receive ([101, police.uk/pu/advice-crime-prevention](https://www.police.uk/pu/advice-crime-prevention)). Your local Neighbourhood Watch can also advise ([0116 402 6111, ourwatch.org.uk](https://www.ourwatch.org.uk)).

If you need home repairs, you can find trading standards-approved businesses through Buy With Confidence ([01392 383430, buywithconfidence.gov.uk](https://www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk)) or ask your friends and neighbours for recommendations. Sold Secure has a searchable directory of approved home security products ([01327 264 687, soldsecure.com](https://www.soldsecure.com)).

Your local Home Improvement Agency may be able to help you, for example by fitting locks, door chains and viewers ([0300 124 0315, findmyhia.org.uk](https://www.findmyhia.org.uk)) and your local Age UK may offer a handyperson service for a small fee ([0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/handyperson-services](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/handyperson-services)).

If you rent

Your landlord may not be responsible for general improvements to your home security, and you may need permission before you can install any additional security measures or change the locks. However, if your home security is at risk because of something that needs fixing, your landlord may be required to carry out repairs.

If you're a tenant and want to make your home more secure, call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.



Your doors

Whether you live in a house or a flat, protecting your doors can go a long way to increasing your overall security. Most burglars get in through a door and even if they don't, they'll try to leave through one. Don't leave your keys in locks or lying around – put them in a safe place out of sight.

If you're going out, even for a short time, lock everything up. If you're at home, consider your safety too. Make sure your front and back doors are locked when you go to bed at night but always keep door and window keys where everyone in the house can find them, for example on a bedside table, so you can get out quickly in the event of a fire. Close internal doors, but don't lock them.

Anna, Independent Age adviser

Check the door frame to make sure it's sturdy and not rotten. You can fit hinge bolts or security hinges for extra security. Glass panels on doors are vulnerable so it's worth replacing them with laminated glass.

Locks

Roughly 70% of burglars enter through a door and around 30% enter through a window, so make sure all your windows and doors are locked. If you have a wooden front door, it should be fitted with a five-lever mortice deadlock and a night latch or rim lock. A wooden back door should also be fitted with a five-lever mortice deadlock and mortice rack bolts to the top and bottom of the door. All locks should display the code BS3621, which is the lock safety standard of the British Standards Institute. If you're worried your current locks don't meet the safety standard, you could ask a locksmith to check them. The Master Locksmiths Association has a searchable directory ([01327 262 255](tel:01327262255), locksmiths.co.uk).

A UPVC or a composite door (made up from a variety of materials) should be fitted with a multi-point lock with a Europrofile cylinder. If you use a cylinder lock, you may need extra protection such as a security door handle.

French doors, patio doors and conservatories need to be as secure as other external doors. Install additional locks and security blocks to stop lifting or forced entry. If you're buying new patio doors, ask for the sliding section to be on the inside and for anti-lift blocks. It's a good idea to have multi-locking systems or mortice security bolts with removable keys at the top and bottom of both doors. Make sure any new doors you buy meet the PAS 24 standard, which is the minimum standard of security for doors and windows.

You may be asked what type of locks you use when you take out or renew your home insurance policy and there may be a minimum requirement. Check with your insurance company.

If you need to have locks fitted or changed, use a professional locksmith. You can find an accredited locksmith through the Master Locksmiths Association ([01327 262 255](tel:01327262255), locksmiths.co.uk/find-a-locksmith). They can also offer more detailed information and advice about locks.

Other door security

- A letterbox draught excluder will make it difficult for intruders to see inside your property.
- Consider putting a cage or restrictor on your letterbox to prevent anyone from reaching inside and trying latches or fishing for keys.
- Get a security chain and use it when you're answering the door. You don't need to leave this on all the time if other key holders, such as carers, need to get in.
- A peephole or viewer can help you safely identify callers – you can get these in different sizes if you have a visual impairment.

When you buzz people in, check that they are who they say they are and that they have some sort of identification on them. Don't let anyone in you're not sure of. Anyone honest won't mind coming back or you checking them out.

There are some simple precautions you can take to protect your windows. Window locks are essential on ground floors and above flat roofs or near a drainpipe. You can buy them from DIY and home security stores and they can be fitted to most types of windows. Check with the installer before you fit them to UPVC or metal windows though, as they may affect your warranty.

Adding adhesive window film to your glazing may protect it from being smashed (make sure it meets the British Standard number BS EN 12600). Window shock alarms are relatively cheap and easy to fit. An alarm will sound if anyone tries to force a window. They may come with an adhesive warning sticker, which can act as an additional deterrent.

If you're buying new windows, make sure they comply with the PAS 24 safety standard.

Remove the keys from locked windows and keep them in a safe place, out of sight, but where you can find them easily.

Outside your home

Well-maintained gates and fences are a sign of a secure home and help to deter burglars. At the front, create a boundary with a low wall or fence, or by planting prickly or barbed shrubbery, such as holly, firethorn or hawthorn if you're able to maintain them. You could also plant low-growing thorny shrubs below windows and drainpipes.

Always keep your front gate closed – consider fitting a gate spring – and keep fences and walls in good repair. If your back garden has an access gate, keep it padlocked and make sure the gate can't just be lifted off its hinges.

I have been burgled and I installed a locked gate to the rear of the house and garden to stop or at least make it difficult for anyone trying to burgle the house.

Nowhere to hide

Keep the view into your front garden clear so any potential intruders are visible. Cut back any overhanging branches or foliage. Boundary fences, walls, shrubs and bushes should be no more than about 1m (3ft) high. Consider using gravel driveways and paths so you can hear anyone approach. You may need planning permission to make changes to a fence, wall or gate. Contact your local council's planning department to find out.



Fence toppings

At the side and rear you need a taller boundary to prevent access – around 2m (6ft) is recommended. A trellis topping will make fencing harder to climb and you could also grow thorny climbers such as roses. If you install a security topping such as plastic spikes, you must display a warning sign to say that it's been fitted. There are some rules about when security toppings (except plants) can be used, so check with your local council's planning department if you're thinking about adding one to a wall or fence.

Lighting

Outdoor lighting that comes on automatically is a powerful deterrent and can also help you find your way if you come back after dark. You can get lighting that's triggered by movement or lights that come on automatically when it gets dark. Position lights at a suitable height so they can't be tampered with and are less likely to be activated by animals, and make sure the light won't annoy your neighbours or distract passing cars. Lights should be fitted by a qualified electrician. Contact Trustmark to find one ([0333 555 1234](tel:03335551234), trustmark.org.uk/find-a-tradesman) or ask your friends and neighbours for recommendations.

Keep it tidy

Sheds and outbuildings are often targeted by burglars. Garden tools are valuable and they can also be used to break into a property. Keep tools locked in sheds and garages. Use heavy duty locks and mark valuable items to make them easier to trace (see chapter 6). You could also fit a shed alarm.

Don't leave rubbish, ladders or anything else lying around that could be used for burglary or vandalism. Ask your neighbours not to leave tools out either. If you have a wheelie bin, store it out of sight so a burglar can't climb up on it. You could consider securing it with a chain or clamp.

Valuable plants and ornaments can be secured by using chains and ground anchors. Bolt or weigh down planters and use lockable brackets for hanging baskets. Garden plants, furniture and tools can be worth a lot of money, so check your insurance policy to make sure it covers your garden.

Other security advice

During the autumn and winter, when it gets dark early, there tend to be more burglaries, especially in the run-up to Christmas. Leave a light on if you go out or use a timer switch so a light comes on when it gets dark.

In spring and summer you may leave windows and doors open or want to get out and about more. Make sure you lock doors and windows in the house even if you're only in the garden. If you're going away, see chapter 7 for more security tips. Garden thefts also increase during the warmer months so protect your things – see chapter 5.

Burglar alarms

Burglar alarms can be a very effective deterrent. There are many different types and costs vary, so get advice before you buy. You could speak to your insurance company or contact your local police Safer Neighbourhood Team or Crime Prevention Officer (**101, [police.uk](https://www.police.uk)**). Your local Home Improvement Agency may be able to help you install one (**0300 124 0315, [findmyhia.org.uk](https://www.findmyhia.org.uk)**).

Before you buy, consider whether you want a system that just sounds an alarm or one that contacts you, nominated friends or family, or a security company when it's triggered.

Don't be tempted to use a dummy alarm – they're easy to spot – and never buy from cold callers or telesales enquirers. You should get at least three quotes from an accredited company. The National Security Inspectorate (NSI) ([01628 637 512](tel:01628637512), nsi.org.uk) and the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB) can help you find the right system and installer ([0191 296 3242](tel:01912963242), ssaib.org).

Property marking and tracing

Marking your property with a security code makes it easy for police to identify it as stolen and return it to you. There are various ways to do this:

- UV pen – your security mark shows up under ultraviolet light. These marks fade over time so reapply every six months
- etching or engraving
- specialist forensic kits that use synthetic DNA.

A simple way to create your own unique security code is by using your postcode, followed by your house or flat number, or the first two letters of

the name of your house. So if your address is 21 Court Street and your postcode XY3 6DE, your unique security code would be XY36DE21, for example.

If you have a laptop, tablet or mobile phone, you can install tracking software to help trace your property if it's stolen. Some software can be downloaded for free.

Take photos of valuable items and make a note of any serial numbers. You can also register them online for free on the national property register [immobilise.com](https://www.immobilise.com). This will make it easier for police to return stolen items to you if they're found.

Ask your local Neighbourhood Watch ([0116 402 6111](tel:01164026111), [ourwatch.org.uk](https://www.ourwatch.org.uk)), Safer Neighbourhood team or Crime Prevention Officer ([101](tel:101), [police.uk](https://www.police.uk)) for more advice.

CCTV

Home CCTV is more affordable these days and it's possible to buy relatively cheap cameras. However, you also need recording equipment, you'll have to factor in the cost of installation and maintenance, and you'll have to pay more to get high-quality images. Motion detection cameras can cut down on the amount of footage you record.

You can get indoor or outdoor CCTV. If your camera is outside, you must comply with data protection and privacy laws and make sure your camera isn't pointing at public spaces or other people's houses or gardens. For more information, contact the Information Commissioner's Office (0303 123 1113, ico.org.uk/your-data-matters/domestic-cctv-systems-guidance-for-people-using-cctv). You also need to position cameras so they can be easily maintained but can't be tampered with.

CCTV tends to work best when used with other deterrents, such as good-quality locks, burglar alarms and security lights.

Distraction burglary

Beware of bogus callers and always ask for ID. Door-to-door callers sometimes work in pairs – one distracts you while the other carries out the burglary.

If someone is at your door and you're not expecting anyone, don't open the door straightaway. Check through your window or peephole and open your door with its security chain on.

For more information on how to deal with this type of situation, see our guide **Scamwise**.

Other tips

- Keep car keys somewhere safe and out of sight.
- Consider fitting a small safe for valuable items – you can get information about safes and other security products from Sold Secure ([01327 264 687](tel:01327264687), soldsecure.com).
- Keep important documents somewhere safe and shred any documents that have your personal details on before you throw them away, or burn them in your fireplace.
- Consider joining your local Neighbourhood Watch ([0116 402 6111](tel:01164026111), ourwatch.org.uk).
- Try to make sure any adaptations you have made to your home don't compromise your security. For example, if you have rails installed by your front door, think about whether they could make it easier to climb up to the first floor windows. If so, make sure you keep your windows locked.

7 If you're going away

Even if you're only popping out for five minutes or going to a communal area in your building, like a laundry, you should always lock up. Create a habit so that every time you go out, your house is secure.

Do you know how to lock your door? I know it sounds a silly question but a significant number of burglaries occur because the householder just didn't lock the door correctly. Take your key outside with you, close the door and see if you can walk back in without unlocking it.

Stephen, Essex Police Crime Prevention Officer

Leave a visible light on if you go out in the evenings and don't leave a spare key in a hiding place (for example, under a doormat or fake stone, or in a plant pot). Leave spare keys with a family member, friend or trusted neighbour instead. You could consider fitting a key safe.

This is a secure box fitted to an outside wall, containing a set of house keys and opened by a code. Make sure it's police approved. Sold Secure could help you find one ([01327 264 687](tel:01327264687), soldsecure.com). Only give the code to trusted people and fit it somewhere out of sight.

If you're going away for longer, don't leave your house looking unoccupied.

Do

- ✓ cancel newspapers, milk and any other regular deliveries
- ✓ create the impression someone is home by using light and radio timers. Don't use a timer switch on lights that can easily be seen through a window
- ✓ mow the lawn before you go
- ✓ ask a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on things, close gates, and make sure post doesn't pile up. For a fee, you could use the Royal Mail's Keepsafe service ([03457 777 888](tel:03457777888), royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/keepsafe). You'll need to apply five days in advance and let them know when you'll be back. They'll hold back your mail until you get home

- ✓ put valuable items out of sight or in a safe. You could leave them with a friend or relative, but check whether your or their insurance would cover the items if they were stolen.

Don't

- ✗ close all your curtains and blinds – this is a giveaway to burglars that no one's at home
- ✗ put your home address on your luggage
- ✗ tell anyone outside your family and close friends that you're going away or for how long
- ✗ post your holiday photos on Facebook, for example, until you get back and be careful what you say on social media.

Just before you leave, lock all doors and windows and set your burglar alarm if you have one.

If you're going away on a longer trip, make sure your house is still covered by your insurance policy. Some insurance policies may not cover a home that's been empty for 30 days or more. If you're planning to be away for a while, you should consider getting unoccupied buildings insurance.

Home insurance

Home insurance can give you peace of mind and will help you replace items if you're burgled. Many people stay with the same insurance company for years but it's worth shopping around. Use price comparison services such as uSwitch (**0800 6888 557, [uswitch.com](https://www.uswitch.com)**) or ring around for quotes. You should base your decision on the cover provided, not just the price. Visit our webpage for more information on getting a good deal (**independentage.org/get-advice/money/saving-money/shopping-around-for-insurance**).

You may be able to reduce your premiums if you have good security, such as alarms or good-quality locks, or you're in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. Some companies offer policies tailored to older people, who may be considered lower risk.

When you take out a policy, be honest about the security you have. If your home is broken into and you weren't using the measures you said you had, your insurer may reject all or part of your claim. If you're not sure what level of security your policy requires, check the small print or phone your insurance company to find out.

What to do if you've been burgled

If you notice signs of a break-in when you get home, don't go inside or call out – go to a neighbour's house and call 101. If you think the intruder is still there, call 999.

A burglary is very upsetting. If your house has been broken into, use this simple checklist.

- Contact the police.
- Check with the police what you can repair or tidy up – a Crime Scene Investigator may need to examine the scene of the burglary first.
- Get a crime number so you can make an insurance claim – the police will give you this.
- Look for your spare house and car keys (burglars may steal these and come back later).
- Change the locks if any keys are missing.
- Secure the property – get broken locks and windows fixed, for example.
- Make a list of what's missing.

- Check you've still got important documents such as your passport, driving licence and birth certificate – if not, contact the relevant agency.
- If your bank cards have been stolen, contact the card issuer.
- Contact your insurance company – depending on your policy, they may offer support to install security measures.
- Take precautions to avoid a repeat.

Being burgled can be distressing even if nothing is taken, and the impact can last a long time.

You can get advice and emotional support from Victim Support, a national charity helping victims of crime ([0808 168 9111](tel:08081689111), [victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support)) whether or not you report the crime. They can give you practical help to make you safer, which might include help to secure your home, such as getting doors and windows fixed or installing a burglar alarm. They can also help you fill in insurance and compensation forms.

If your case goes to court, you may get support from the Citizens Advice witness service ([03444 111 444](tel:03444111444), [citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/citizens-advice-witness-service](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/citizens-advice-witness-service)).

Rose's story

"Because I had evergreens at the front of my house, no one on the street could see anything behind them. The community policemen had warned me they might encourage burglars but I felt they made my home private.

"In winter I go up to bed early and watch TV. I felt safe. I thought my big downstairs window was stuck down with paint, but the man who broke in used something to wrench it open.

"I didn't have net curtains so it was easy to see inside. I think he must have tried my doorbell, which was broken, and thought no one was in. I heard this crash at 8.30pm and peeked down the stairs. He saw me and ran away empty-handed. I ran back into the bedroom and blocked the door with a chest of drawers. I opened the window and shouted to the girls next door, 'Call the police!'

"The police arrived and stayed until one of my daughters arrived.

"I was terrified for months. This had been my home for 50 years but I put it up for sale.

"I was going to move to a retirement home. Then I changed my mind because I want to live privately. I sometimes dreamt that people were breaking in, but I can overcome fear. I am a strong person.

"Since then I have had my doorbell mended and an alarm fitted. In the evenings, I keep my blinds down and I make sure I have a light on if I'm in or out after dark. I've also cut down the trees.

"But break in or no break in, I'm not moving."



Picture posed by model

About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website **independentage.org**

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an adviser. Lines are open 8.30am – 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org**



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