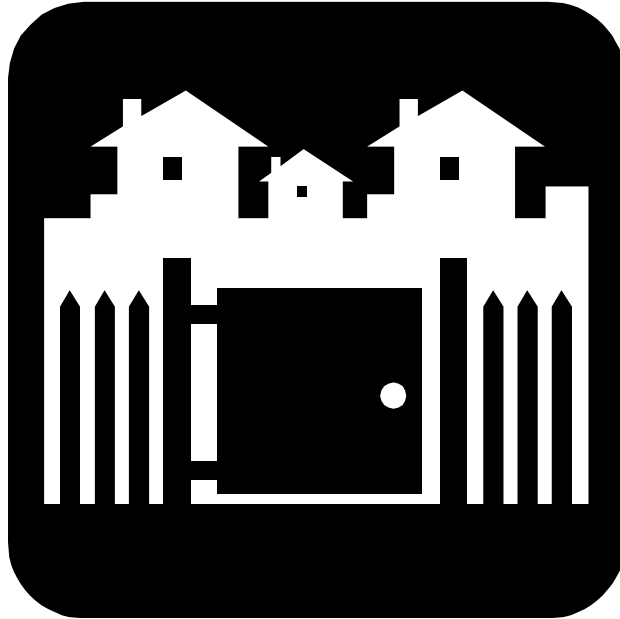


# WHAT DO I DO AFTER I'VE BEEN VICTIMIZED BY A BREAK & ENTER?

An Information Guide



**Victim Services of Leeds & Grenville**  
**4109 County Road 29, Leeds County OPP**  
**1-800-939-7682**  
**613-341-7700**

## COMMON REACTIONS AFTER A BREAK & ENTER

Break & Enter (B&E) crimes are known as the most serious property crimes in Canada today. B&E crimes involve individuals breaking into a home, business, or other property with the purpose of stealing or doing damage. As a result, victims of a B&E can suffer more than the loss of their property. They may experience strong feelings such as anger, fear and a sense of personal violation.

As a victim of a B&E, you may experience emotions that are difficult for you to deal with and you may feel confused and frustrated by the police and court system. You may also want to know how to protect your home, business or property in the future. This booklet was created to answer some of your questions. It will reassure you that what you are feeling is completely normal and tell you some of the ways you can help yourself cope with what has happened. It will also tell you how to increase the security of your property and where you can get more help or information.

### SOME THINGS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE



#### **Shock and Disbelief**

You may experience shock and disbelief that your property has actually been broken into and that your possessions have been gone through and stolen.

#### **Sense of Violation**

After the initial shock of becoming the victim of a B&E, you may experience a sense of violation. This sense of violation and loss is both financial and emotional. Not only have your possessions been stolen from you by unknown individuals but they have also managed to take away your privacy and sense of personal security.

#### **Fear**

Once you have been the target of a B&E, you may fear that your home or business is no longer a safe place. You may feel uncomfortable being alone, or worry when you are not there. You may be afraid that someone could break in again. Asking your local police or Victim Services about crime prevention can help decrease the chances of another B&E happening. You may also find yourself feeling suspicious and fearful of strangers in and around your community. Some people fear that they are being singled out, but thieves usually want your possessions and do not break into your home or business because of who you are.

#### **Anger and Frustration**

Anger at the criminals is a very normal feeling. You may feel frustration because you are not able to express your anger directly at the person or people responsible for the crime. You may also feel frustrated and angry at the police especially if they have not been successful in finding the criminals or your stolen items.

## **Stress**

Following a B & E, you may experience signs of stress and may develop physical symptoms, such as sleeping or eating difficulties. Fear and anxiety may also increase your stress level. If you have children affected by the B&E, dealing with their feelings can also be stressful.

## **Guilt**

Guilt is often another common reaction. When someone else commits a criminal act by breaking the law, it is not the victim's fault.

## **Anxiety**

You may find that you startle more easily at little noises or abrupt movements.

## **Isolation**

You may feel that you are the only one having reactions to the break-in. You may feel isolated from family, friends and co-workers and feel that no one can understand what you are going through.

## **THINGS YOU CAN DO THAT MAY HELP**



Individuals who have been victimized by a Break & Enter are sometimes surprised that the effects of the trauma can last longer than they expected. Remember that what you are feeling is perfectly normal and that these feelings will pass in time. Meanwhile, there are some things you can do to make this time easier and help you move forward towards a renewed sense of well being.

- Dealing with a B & E can sometimes be very stressful, so be sure to take care of yourself both physically and emotionally:
  - get plenty of rest
  - relax in a warm bath
  - listen to music
  - eat a balanced diet
  - use prayer or meditation
  - engage in activities you enjoy (gardening, watching a movie)
  - spend time with people you care about
  - talk to someone you trust about the experience
  - exercise – even a short walk can be helpful
  - avoid excess use of alcohol or drugs
  
- If you are frightened, get someone to stay at your house with you or stay at a friend's or with a member of your family.
  
- Encourage children and family members or co-workers (if it is a business) to talk about their feelings. Talking about the experience is a very good way to relieve stress.
  
- If you are having difficulty sleeping, it's important to know that this will

pass in time. In the meantime, do what comforts you – read a book, draw, watch television, listen to music, write in a journal or do some work around the house.

- Seek information and recommendations on ways to make your home or business safer and less attractive to a potential criminal.
- Seek help from a victim services provider who can offer support, information and provide referrals to other services in your community.

If you have suffered from serious physical or psychological harm, you may wish to contact the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board or another community support agency in your area. Important numbers are listed in the Community Resources section of this guide.

## COMMON REACTIONS IN CHILDREN



Children who have been involved in a traumatic incident such as a Break and Enter need the attention and close physical contact of their parents or caregivers to reassure them of their physical safety. Children will often experience the same types of feelings as adults but may have a more difficult time expressing those feelings. Their fear, anxiety, or anger may be expressed by demonstrating changes in behaviour. Children often do not have the necessary coping skills.

Children of different ages will handle their stress differently. Here are some common responses children may display:

- feelings of helplessness
- change in sleeping/eating habits (i.e. nightmares, loss of appetite)
- generalized fears such as being afraid of everyone and everything
- regressive behaviours such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, whining
- aggressiveness or angry outbursts
- crying/sadness
- separation anxiety/clingy
- hyper and difficult to settle or quiet and withdrawn
- stomach aches or headaches
- nausea and diarrhea
- excessive worry or concern for others
- feelings of guilt and responsibility
- depression or irritability
- action oriented responses such as revenge
- discomfort with feelings of vulnerability
- hate or expressions of anger
- confusion
- anxieties/worries about their safety and safety of others
- substance use or abuse in teens

## HELPING CHILDREN COPE

There are many ways to help restore your child's emotional well being following a Break & Enter or traumatic experience. Here are some things you can do to make this time easier and to make things better for your children in the future:

- reassure them that they are safe
- give them time to process the event
- try to keep their routine as normal as possible
- take opportunities to listen to and talk to your child
- be aware of changes in behaviour
- encourage them to play and draw – it is a way to cope with stress and anxious feelings
- practice ways to help them relax
- let them cry and feel what they are feeling
- offer hugs of reassurance
- talk about your own reactions in age appropriate ways
- engage in healthy behaviour
- make time for fun activities
- encourage them to ask for help if they need it
- be compassionate
- keep an open line of communication
- don't assume you know how they feel

Keep in mind that children imitate the behaviour of their parents, so it is important to be aware of how you are acting or reacting to the stress and anxiety you are feeling in the presence of your children. Talk to your doctor or a counselor for help in dealing with your children's feelings and reactions if they go on for a long time.

## HOME AND BUSINESS SECURITY



Although Break and Enters may seem random in occurrence, they often actually involve a selection process. The criminal's selection process is simple. Choose an unoccupied home, business or property with the easiest access, the greatest amount of cover, and with the best escape routes. There is no such thing as a criminal-proof home or business. However, there are homes and businesses that are too difficult to break into. The enemies of the B & E criminal are time and attention. The longer it takes to enter and the more noise he/she makes increase his/her chance of being seen and caught. Homes and businesses not easily and quickly broken into are most often bypassed for easier targets. What follows is a list of suggestions to minimize your risk by making your home or business unattractive to potential criminals.

The first step is to **harden the target** or make your home/business more

difficult to enter. Remember, the criminal will simply bypass your home/business if it looks like it requires too much effort or requires more skill and tools than they possess.

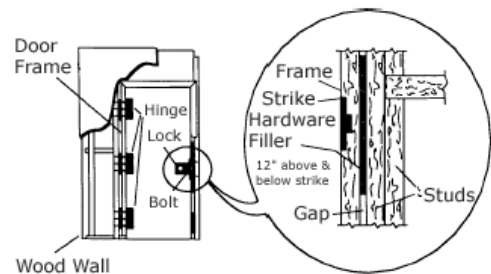
## INTERIOR SECURITY

### Doors and Locks

It only takes a few seconds for a criminal to force open your front door. A kick at the right place or a solid shoulder is sometimes all it takes. It doesn't matter if your home or property is new or twenty years old. The problem remains the same. Remember that a door system is only as secure as its weakest component. You must address and reinforce all of the following:

#### **Doors and Frames (exterior door only):**

- All exterior doors, including exterior and interior garage doors, should be of solid wood construction. No panels should exist on the doors
- All exterior door frames should be set in frame openings constructed of double studding, including garage doors, but excluding overhead doors.
- Door frames should be installed to close tolerances (0.5 cm or 0.2 inches) inside the rough opening. An alternative is filler material (solid hardwood blocks) around frames at critical areas such as locks, latches and hinges.
- The studding, spacing and non-compressible filler material add to the integrity of the frame, reduce the gap between the door frame and the wall studs (a potential pry area), and allow for a strong structure to support the required security hardware.
- Steel doors should be of steel grid, or steel edge construction with a minimum steel thickness of 20-gauge. Some steel doors are equipped with wood frames that are steel clad. Although these frames may offer a greater degree of protection, they should still be considered as wood frames and installed accordingly.



#### **Glass Area In and Around Doors**

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** The installation of glass in or around doors within 40 inches of a lock will allow a criminal to break the glass and reach in to unlock the door. If glass is present within 40 inches of a deadbolt lock such as in a decorative front door, a window security film can be applied or a decorative grille over the glass can be installed with non-removable screws on the inside of the door. Other options include the removal of the glass and installation of a polycarbonate panel (i.e. lexan or lucite) which is more break-resistant or adding another lock on the door that cannot be reached within 40 inches of the glass area.

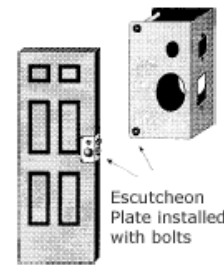
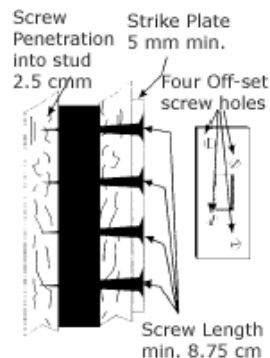
#### **Patio Doors**

While proper locks on sliding glass doors are recommended, inserting a fitted piece of wood or installing a track stop/lock in the door's lower track improves

security. Also, ensure that the patio door cannot be lifted and taken out of the track. A screw can be installed at the top of the track to avoid this from happening. Placing a visible decal on the glass door near the latch mechanism that indicates an alarm system is also a good deterrent.

### **Deadbolt Locks and Door Hardware**

- Deadbolt locks are the most recommended kind for exterior doors. A quality deadbolt lock will have a beveled casing to inhibit the use of channel-lock pliers used to shear off lock cylinder pins.
- Use a quality, heavy-duty, deadbolt lock with a one inch or one and a half inch throw bolt.
- Use a heavy-duty, four screw strike plate with 3-inch screws to penetrate into the wooden door frame stud. Use these longer screws for all door hardware and use at least one long screw in each door hinge.
- Once the strike is properly secured, the force of any attack is transmitted to the door. Most residential doors are built using wooden edges that split easily under the force of an attack. To strengthen the door, an escutcheon plate is required. All exterior doors should have escutcheon plates with back plates or wrap-around door channels installed around any deadbolt lock. Plates are to be secured from the inside with 1.9 cm or ¾ inch carriage or hex bolts that cannot be removed from the exterior. The small screws that are supplied with most escutcheon plates should be replaced with bolts.



## **Windows**

### **Window Latches and Alternate Security Devices**

Windows are left unlocked and open much more often than doors. An open window, visible from the street may be the sole reason for your home to be selected by a criminal. Ground-floor windows are more susceptible to break-ins. Upper floor windows become targets if they can be accessed from a stairway, tree, fence, or by climbing on balconies. Windows have latches, not locks and, therefore, should have secondary blocking devices to prevent sliding them open from the outside. Inexpensive wooden dowels and sticks work well for vertical sliding windows.

In bedrooms, window blocking devices should be capable of being removed easily from the inside to comply with fire codes. Like patio doors, anti-lift devices are a good idea for ground level and accessible aluminum windows that slide horizontally. The easiest and most cost effective method is to install screws half-way into the upper track of the movable glass panel to prevent it from being lifted out in the closed position. Remember that a locked window indicates to the criminal that he/she will not be able to enter the house easily. He/she will have to cause more of a racket in the neighbourhood to gain entry, increasing his/her chances of getting caught.

### **Window Security Film**

Window security film is a thick, optically clear barrier film that bonds to the inside of windows, reinforcing the glass and helping to hold it safely in place upon impact and is a remarkably effective protection device. Any attempt to shatter a glass protected by window film will be more difficult. Window film can easily handle the pressure of a series of intensive strikes. Window film is an efficient method for window protection and should be especially considered on windows and windows in doors placed within 40 inches of a latch or lock to prevent a criminal from breaking the glass and reaching inside to unlock the window or door.

### **Garages**



Garages are often targeted since they may contain valuables such as power tools and ATVs. If your garage is attached to your home or business, thieves can attempt to gain entry into your home/business.

- Use a good quality deadbolt and strike plate on exterior doors and doors leading to your home or business; lock all doors when not in use.
- Secure garage windows with bars or security film.
- Ensure that the door between your house or business and attached garage swings inward into the garage. Install door hinges inside of the door inside the house or business area.
- Overhead garage doors should be constructed of solid materials such as steel or solid wood. Caution should be used with heavy wood doors that have decorative plywood panels which can easily be kicked in. The door should fit tightly to the frame when closed.
- When you move into a new place, change the remote code.

### **Alarm Systems**

Alarm systems are an important part of a home/business security plan and are effective when used properly. Alarm systems deter criminals because they increase the potential and fear of being caught. Security company lawn signs or window decals are great deterrents. A criminal will often bypass a property with visible alarm signs unless they know that the alarm is never activated.

Alarm systems need to be installed properly and regularly maintained. All systems should have a loud bell or horn to be effective in case someone tries to break in. A central alarm monitoring station will call police if the alarm is triggered. Ensure your response call list is updated regularly with your alarm company. It is also a good idea to have a trusted neighbour watch out for your property while you are not there who will be on alert if your alarm is triggered.

If an alarm system is not an affordable security measure at this time, there are inexpensive Intruder/House Alert Systems that can be purchased at most department stores or dollar stores. They consist of an easy to install magnetic system that alerts you if your doors or windows have been opened. Once the contact is broken, a loud piercing sound (90 db) is emitted from the device. The device can be easily activated or deactivated with an on/off switch.



## EXTERIOR SECURITY

### Outdoor Lighting



Dark places provide locations and opportunities where criminals could hide or gain entry into your home or business without being seen. Outside lights are very important, especially near doorways, windows and at the rear of your property where break-ins occur more frequently. All lights should be placed high enough so that the bulbs cannot be unscrewed easily. If this is not possible, install a protective cage around the bulb. Outside lights should always be on a timer to establish a routine and appearance of occupancy at all times. The practice of leaving lights on all day in a residential dwelling is often a clear sign to criminals that you are away.

Motion detector lights are often used at the back of a residential property since the bedrooms are often located in that area. Although motion detectors are a popular choice and very cost effective, remember that this can also sometimes assist criminals by giving them just enough light to position themselves properly before the light turns itself off. There are different types of motion detector lighting choices. It is important to select an adequate lighting system that will meet your security needs.

If you own a business or commercial property and you cannot create an appearance of occupancy at all times due to your hours of operation, good lighting is highly recommended. Ideally, exterior lights need to be bright enough for you to see 100 feet and it helps if you can identify colours. Good lighting is definitely a deterrent to criminals since they don't want to be seen or identified.

### Landscaping and Yard Maintenance

Many criminals do not plan their break-ins. They are crimes of opportunity. They select what appears to be a simple target. If they see a greater risk than they anticipated, they move on to another target. Therefore, the more effort you make to keep your property from appearing to be an easy target, the safer your property will be. A multilayered structure is the best way to approach securing your property and the first layer is the landscaping and other features of your yard.

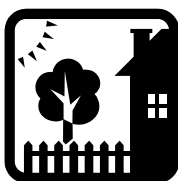
A few simple changes to your landscaping can help to protect your home or business from criminals. They are looking for a property they can get into and out of quickly. The more time they spend in and around your home or business, the more they are chancing getting caught. Often, their best target is a property surrounded by tall hedges, trees and shrubs, which restrict visibility from the street or your neighbours' houses. Here are some landscaping/yard maintenance recommendations:

- Trim your trees and shrubbery so that your doors and windows can be seen by neighbours and from the street. Trees should have their lower branches trimmed to at least 7 feet from the ground and bushes/shrubs should be trimmed down to no more than 3 feet in height. If you have a second floor, trim trees so that they are away from an upper

floor window. Although you may be losing a little privacy, you will not be providing a hiding place for a criminal.

- Be sure to keep your lawn trimmed and well maintained. An uncut lawn and unkept yard will indicate to a criminal that you are either away or don't care about your property.
- Plant thorny or prickly plants along fences and under windows and on border fences. Rose bushes, holly or other thorny plant are ideal. Protecting your home with thorny plants can be a good psychological deterrent (sending the message that it will hurt if anyone tries to go there).
- Avoid using large rocks or stones for ornamental design. These can easily be used as a tool to break in.
- Keep all tools and ladders securely locked and out of sight.

### **Gates and Fences**



There are many types of fences. A fence can serve many purposes. It can protect your home or business from inquisitive eyes. It can prevent or hinder a criminal from entering your property or can prevent your small children from getting too close to the road while playing in the yard. A fence can also be purely ornamental, and define areas of your property. It can

further be a psychological deterrent sending a message to others not to cross the barrier. Here are some safety considerations for fences and gates:

- Fences can stop criminals from carrying away your large possessions as long as the gates are locked. Gates should be locked at all times.
- Privacy fences are great for privacy but remember that they are also great for criminals to jump and not be seen by anyone once on the property.
- Fences are used to control the access to your property. Fencing which allows your property to still be visible will create a barrier that will make a potential criminal feel uncomfortable as they approach your home or business but will not prevent a neighbour or passerby from seeing any unusual activity. They are more likely to be challenged and questioned about their behaviour.

### **ADDITIONAL SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Make sure your house/business address or civic number is easily seen from the street. This can make it easier for police or emergency services to find your home.
- Ensure all vehicles, sheds and out buildings are locked and secure.
- Purchase a security camera system to monitor the exterior of your property.
- Consider getting a dog as it can be a deterrent to criminals. A barking dog risks drawing attention and is usually not something a criminal wants to deal with.
- Newly purchased expensive items such as electronics (televisions and computer equipment), should not be advertised by placing the empty boxes at the road with pictures facing out.

## IDENTIFICATION OF VALUABLES



It is recommended that you engrave your drivers' license on televisions, stereos, computers and other electronic appliances/equipment. If your items are stolen and recovered, police will be able to identify them and locate you more easily.

It is also recommended that you photograph or take a video recording of your valuables in their original locations around your home or business and make a list of their make, model and serial numbers. This will be important for proof when filing insurance claims. The list should be copied and one copy kept in a safety deposit box and the other with a relative for safe keeping. Keep receipts of the more expensive items in case you need to prove their value. It is also a good idea to photocopy important documents and the content of your wallet in case these items are lost or stolen.

Valuables such as jewelry should be kept in an unlikely area such as the laundry room (i.e. in an empty jug of bleach). Criminals know the usual hiding spots (under a mattress, in the freezer, etc.) so don't hide cash or valuables where they are most likely to look.

## SECURITY TIPS WHEN YOU ARE AWAY

- Tell a neighbour you trust when you are going to be gone for a significant period of time and when you expect to be back. Leave a key and contact information with them or a family member while you are gone.
- Ask a neighbour to remove any items collecting around the house such as newspapers or mail. Ensure that recycle or trash cans can be put away.
- If you are gone for an extended period of time, ask someone to maintain the exterior of your house or property (mowing the lawn, watering plants, shoveling the driveway).
- Install timers on a few lights throughout your home. Installing timers on a radio or television is also a good idea.
- Never leave a message on your answering machine indicating that you are away on vacation.
- Never leave a note on your door stating that you are out.
- Do not completely close drapes or blinds. Leaving them partially open will create an impression that someone may be home and watching them.
- If you are afraid to leave your home for a long period of time or are isolated from your neighbours, you can consider hiring the services of a security company for patrol or alarm monitoring services. Security guards can make regular checks on your home and/or respond to an alarm activation in your absence.

**The information provided in this booklet was compiled in consultation with the following resources:**

Home Security-Burglary Prevention Advice by Chris E. McGoey

[www.HomeSecurityGuru.com](http://www.HomeSecurityGuru.com)

OPP Tip Sheet-Home Security 2, Doors and Frames

OPP Tip Sheet-Home Security 3, Security Hardware

Dealing with a Break and Enter-Medicine Hat Police Service

OPP Tip Sheet-Victim of Crime? Common Reactions

City of Richmond – RCMP Home Safety

**Notes**

**Community Resources**

**In Case of Emergency – Call 911**

**Brockville Police Service**

- 613-342-0127 (non-emergency)

**Grenville County OPP**

- 613-925-4221

**Leeds County OPP**

- 613-345-1790 (non-emergency)

**Crime Stoppers Hotline**

- 1-800-222-8477



**Mental Health Crisis Line of Leeds & Grenville**

- 1-866-281-2911

**Criminal Injuries Compensation Board**

- 1-800-372-7463

**For further information on resources and services in your community or to enquire about receiving a home or business security audit, please contact Victim Services of Leeds & Grenville at 1-800-939-7682 or 613-341-7700.**