

KEEPING OUR ELDERS SAFE



The recent rash of home invasions across Canada has many of us worried about security, particularly if we have elderly parents living independently.

Although home invasions against

seniors account for less than .5% of all crimes, what makes them so frightening is that home invasions include a specific intent to confront or attack the occupant(s). So what can you do to assist elderly parents to remain secure in their homes?

Begin with a thorough analysis of possible weaknesses in security (your local Crime Prevention Office can assist you). **Try to think like a criminal.** Where would you see an opportunity?

> **If entry doors are hollow**, replace them with solid wood or metal doors with a one-way peephole at eye-level (your parents', not yours). Reinforce the frame and install deadbolts with a minimum 1" throw and 3" screws in the strike plate. Cover windows and glass doors with security film or consider replacing the inside pane with Plexiglas. Place a metal bar in the frame of sliding windows and patio doors to prevent them from being opened from the outside, and screw in a short, thick screw in the space between the top of the patio door and its frame to prevent anyone from lifting the door off its track.

> **Install lights above entry ways**, placed out of reach and covered with heavy glass or wire cages so bulbs can't be removed or broken. Leave the lights on permanently or install motion sensors. Trees and shrubs that hide windows or doors from view should be trimmed back.

> **Consider an alarm**, but keep in mind your parents' ability to remember the code. If you decide an alarm is appropriate, ask around for referrals. Always get three quotes and demand to see the company's licence from the Ministry of the Attorney General. In some areas you may have to register with a false alarm reduction program. Your local police can advise you on this.

> **Criminals will often pose as delivery agents** or meter readers to gain access. Insist the door never be opened to strangers. Educate your elders to ask for identification and to call employers for verification. If someone claims to be in distress, have parents call 911 but keep the door locked.

> **Install a cordless phone at their bedside**, with the line coming in high through the bedroom wall. This prevents intruders from cutting the line from the outside or unplugging the phone upon entry. Parents should keep the phone on their person throughout the day, and place it in its cradle to recharge at night.

Encourage your parents to get to know their neighbours—people are more likely to watch out for someone they know. Block Watch programs are very effective; check if there is one in the area and, if not, encourage the community to join.

Remember, too, that the elderly are often reluctant to call for help, fearing they might be perceived as "overreacting" or "a burden." Emphasise that it's better to be safe than sorry, and that neither you nor police will ever dismiss your parents' concerns. ~

STYLE VS. SECURITY: Striking a balance

We all want to feel secure in our homes but no one wants to feel like they live in a prison. Sure, security bars across all the windows will keep out intruders, but they can also have a depressing effect on the psyche—and can even be a security hazard in the event of a fire. Safety, therefore, should always be a thoughtful blend of security and style.

As you go about making your parents' home more secure, consider the following ideas so your efforts will feel less invasive. To start with, entry doors come in many styles and colors; choose one that fits the overall design of the home. If you can only afford a plain door, jazz it up with an eye-catching paint job.

For maximum security, lock the door with a Weiser deadbolt from our WD4000 series. The high-security trim projects only 5/8" (16 mm) from the face of the door and a free-turning, hardened steel security roller in the deadbolt makes it virtually impossible to saw through the bolt.



Together, these features offer the greatest resistance to physical assault by pipe wrench, hammer, pry bar, et cetera. These locks are available in six finishes so you'll be able to find one that goes well with the color and style of your door.

When choosing bars for sliding windows and patio doors, pick one in a finish that blends in with the window frame. Or go the opposite way and match the color to curtains, curtain rods, or the color of the blinds: bars can be painted with metal paint in a variety of shades.

Consider landscaping choices that double as security devices: beneath accessible windows plant thorny roses, the popular firethorn, or blackberry bushes. The first offers beautiful flowers for your dining table, the second attracts a plethora of birds, and the third provides succulent berries for desserts or jams. A clever way to combine beauty with security!

Window security film comes in varying degrees of thickness from 4 to 10 mm; the thicker, the stronger. Most are clear, though you can choose a silvery tinted one with a mirrored effect most often seen on commercial buildings. Tinted film has the added bonus of heat rejection, but it can look strange on many houses (though it sure beats the look of tin foil in the window!).

Entry lights with Lexan® thermoplastic or Halophane glass that resists breakage are more stylish than wire cages around your exterior fixtures. Exterior Lexan and Halophane lights are usually only found at commercial or marine lighting stores.

If you decide upon full window bars for lower levels, again consider the overall style of the home and choose accordingly. Make sure the bars can be unlocked from the inside in case of fire. Keep the key on the wall just out of reach of the window (so thieves can't break the glass and reach in for the key) and mark the key with glow-in-the-dark paint.

Most importantly, encourage a community spirit! Nothing is more stylish than friends and family, and company means your parents won't be alone—and vulnerable—as often. ~