

Chapter 12

Protecting Yourself from Crime

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SYNOPSIS

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12-1. Protection from Street Crime

- ▶ Walk with confidence and remain aware of your surroundings.
- ▶ Do not walk alone on dark, deserted streets.
- ▶ Park in well-lit areas as close as possible to the door of a business.
- ▶ Ask a store clerk to walk you to your car.
- ▶ Lock your car doors at all times.
- ▶ Look under, around, and inside your car before getting in it.
- ▶ Keep your wallet or purse where pickpockets cannot reach it. A close-fitting pouch is more secure than a purse.
- ▶ Hold your purse firmly and do not leave it unattended on a counter, grocery cart, or car seat.
- ▶ Wallets should be kept in front pockets to avoid a pickpocket attempt from a person approaching from behind.
- ▶ Separate your cash, checks, and credit cards in your purse or pocket to reduce a loss if a pickpocket tries to take your wallet.
- ▶ Do not use the remote control to open your car door until you are at the car.

- ▶ Only carry the cards you know you will need that day, and never carry your Social Security card.
- ▶ Carry a driver's license and other important papers in a small wallet kept in your pocket.
- ▶ Never carry a large sum of money.
- ▶ Never write your PIN number on your ATM or Electronic Banking Transfer cards.
- ▶ Avoid ATM machines in deserted areas. Instead, use ATMs in stores or bank lobbies.
- ▶ Immediately put the money you withdraw into your wallet or purse before walking away.
- ▶ Keep a list of your credit cards somewhere other than your wallet to make it easier to report a loss. Report any loss immediately.
- ▶ If you are going out alone at night, let someone know your plans. When out alone, keep a whistle or personal body alarm handy and hold your keys in your hand while walking.
- ▶ Avoid waiting at deserted bus stops. Walk to the next bus stop where others may be waiting. Also, consider taking a taxi and ask the driver to wait until you are inside at home.
- ▶ If you are riding the bus, be aware of anyone who might be staring at you. Tell the bus driver if you are concerned for your safety. You can prevent trouble by anticipating it.
- ▶ If someone grabs your purse, do not put yourself at risk by resisting. If you try to resist, you may be injured. Other options are to sit down to avoid being knocked down, make noise, whistle, or call for help. In any case, tell the police as soon as possible.
- ▶ Always remember — your life and well-being are more important than your belongings.

Victims' compensation programs help victims of violent crimes. For more information or an application form, contact your local district attorney's office.

12-2. Protection at Home

- ▶ When planning to be away from home, never hide a door key under the doormat, behind the shutter, or in a mailbox. These are the first places a burglar looks. A neighbor or family member can keep an extra key for you.
- ▶ Turn on some inside lights when you are away. Use timers to vary the lights you leave on. A dark home is an invitation to burglars.

- ▶ Keep outside lights near doors and large windows turned on. Strong outside lighting helps prevent burglaries.
- ▶ When you plan to be away from home a long time, tell the police. Ask a friend or family member to check your home each day, turn on different lights, pick up mail and newspapers, mow the grass, and set out trash on regular trash pick-up days.
- ▶ Lock your doors and windows whether you are at home or away, and remember to keep your screen or storm door locked.
- ▶ When at home, keep your shades pulled at night and whenever you are undressing. Be cautious as to who knows you are alone.
- ▶ When someone knocks at your door, first check to see who it is and do not open your door to a stranger. Ask for identification and references before you let anyone into your house. If the person shows you a business card, call the company for proof before you let the stranger into your home. Also, call the police or fire department if anyone claiming to be an officer is at your door.
- ▶ Use deadbolt locks that require a key inside and outside (but keep your key in the inside of the door in case of a fire).
- ▶ Consider replacing the glass in your door with Plexiglas or Lexan or covering it with a decorative iron grill.
- ▶ Keep all doors and windows in good repair.
- ▶ Inside locks should secure all windows, except emergency exits. Place a broomstick or pole in the track of sliding doors or windows so they cannot be forced open by a burglar.
- ▶ Trim shrubs and bushes hiding doors and windows because they make excellent cover for burglars.
- ▶ Do not keep large amounts of money in your house. Burglars look in your bedroom first for valuables, so put valuables somewhere else in the house or in a safe deposit box.
- ▶ Do not list your first name or address in the telephone book or on your mailbox.
- ▶ Call your local police department for a home security and personal safety review of your home.
- ▶ Call your local fire department for help designing a fire safety plan.
- ▶ Mark your valuables with an identification number or name. This makes it difficult for a burglar to sell your valuables and easier for the police to return them to you. Your local police department can refer you to an engraving service. Sometimes libraries will have engraving tools to loan. Photograph jewelry and artwork and keep copies of these in a safe deposit box or with your insurance agent.

12-3. Protection on the Computer

- ▶ If you receive an email that promotes sweepstakes, lotteries, charities, credit repair, work-at-home offers, or is threatening in nature (for example, if the email says you owe money), delete the e-mail without opening it. Don't be "spooked" into responding quickly before you have time to verify the source of the message.
- ▶ **Never** give any personal information to anyone who contacts you. Delete the email and then contact the company using a phone number or website address that you know to be authentic.
- ▶ **REMEMBER:** Credit card companies, banks and other financial institutions, and government agencies (IRS, Social Security, etc.) will **never** ask for personal information or ask you to update your account information online.
- ▶ Keep your security software updated. Personal firewalls and security software packages (with anti-virus, anti-spam, and spyware detection features) are a must-have for those who engage in online financial transactions. Also, make sure your computer has the latest security patches.
- ▶ Make sure that you access your online accounts only on a secure web page using encryption. The website address of a secure website connection starts with "https" instead of just "http" and has a key or closed padlock in the status bar.
- ▶ Use your own computer. It is generally safer to access your online accounts from your own computer than from other computers. If you use a computer other than your own, for example, you will not know if it contains viruses or spyware.
- ▶ Never post identifying information about you or your family on your personal website or social media sites.
- ▶ When making purchases online, deal only with reputable, well-established companies that you know. Remember that online shopping is not different than shopping offline. You will find reputable and disreputable businesses in both worlds.
- ▶ Always use a credit card when making online purchases. Never pay with cash, a check, or a money order because in a fraudulent transaction, you have very little hope of getting your money back. With a credit card your limit of liability by law is \$50.00.
- ▶ Never give your bank account number or Social Security number to any online merchant.
- ▶ Do not open any email attachments unless you absolutely know who sent the email.
- ▶ Use "strong" passwords to protect your information. Strong passwords are a combination of letters, numbers, and symbols. Never use your mother's maiden name, the names of your children, your date of birth, your address, or any portion of your Social Security number.
- ▶ Do not use any website's automatic login feature, which saves your username and password — type it in each time you use the computer.

- ▶ Always log off each time you are finished. If your laptop is stolen, the thief will have to work harder to get access to the information stored there.
- ▶ Do not let online businesses store your account information. It may be an inconvenience, but you are much safer typing your information in each time you place an order.

12-4. Protection from Abuse

You do not have to accept threats or abuse from anyone, including your family. If someone close to you has threatened you with violence or abused you in any way, there are state laws in place to protect you. A **protection order** can be issued through the county court in the county where the abuser lives that restricts that person from having contact with you under certain conditions. There are both civil and criminal protection orders and each applies under the following circumstances.

Civil Protection Orders: If you are being physically or verbally threatened by an abuser, you can ask the court to protect you by filing a civil protection order against that abuser. Civil protection orders are actions the victim can take when the abuser has not been charged with a crime.

Criminal Protection Orders: When an abuser has been charged with a crime, mandatory protection orders are automatically put into place to protect the victim from the abuser and will stay in place for the duration of the court proceedings, up to the sentencing of the abuser. Permanent civil protection orders may be considered after that point.

For various reasons, actions taken by an abuser such as harassment, stalking, sexual abuse, violence, verbal or physical threats/intimidation, or other forms of mistreatment and abuse are not always charged criminally. Under these circumstances, if you fear for your safety or the safety of others, civil protection orders can offer you safeguards. Under Colorado law, there are two categories of civil protection orders, as follows:

1) Domestic Violence Protection Order:

Under this law, the abuser can be:

- ▶ A current or former relative by blood or marriage;
- ▶ Someone who lives or has lived with you; or
- ▶ Someone you are, or have been, intimately involved with.

A temporary or permanent protection order to prevent domestic abuse may include:

- ▶ Stopping an abuser from threatening, molesting, injuring, or contacting you; and
- ▶ Keeping the abuser from your home if you can show that you could be physically or emotionally harmed.

2) Protection Order for Stalking, Sexual Assault, Physical Harm/Threats, and Abuse of Elderly/At-risk Adult

Under this law, the abuser can be:

- ▶ Anyone who is harming you, regardless of your relationship to that person;
- ▶ Anyone, regardless if you have been in an intimate relationship with that person.

With a temporary or permanent protection order to prevent physical or emotional abuse, you can stop someone, such as a stranger or home health worker, from:

- ▶ Verbal threats or assaults;
- ▶ Verbal harassment;
- ▶ The inappropriate use or threat of inappropriate use of medications;
- ▶ The inappropriate use of physical or chemical restraints;
- ▶ The misuse of a power of attorney that results in unreasonable confinement or restriction of your liberty if you are 70 or older; or
- ▶ The misuse of a guardianship or conservatorship that results in unreasonable confinement or restriction of your liberty if you are 70 or older.

Protection orders can be written to include many restrictions. Some of the possible restrictions include:

- ▶ Inhibiting the abuser from entering the home;
- ▶ Confining that person to a designated distance from a place or home; and
- ▶ Prohibiting the abuser from having contact with or harming an animal or pet.

The necessary forms and instructions for protection orders are available at the county court and should be filed in the county where the abuser lives, where the abuse occurred, where you live, where you work, or where the abuser works. The filing fee and sheriff's fee for service can be waived if you cannot afford to pay them. You can contact victim assistance agencies to accompany you and assist you with the paperwork. They also can refer you to safe shelters and other services.

See also Chapter 33, "Mandatory Reporting of Elder Abuse or Exploitation."

12-5. Resources

Colorado Crime Victims Compensation Programs

First Judicial District (Gilpin and Jefferson counties)

District Attorney's Office
(303) 271-6846

Second Judicial District (Denver County)

District Attorney's Office
(720) 913-9253

Third Judicial District (Huerfano and Las Animas Counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 738-1510

Fourth Judicial District (El Paso and Teller counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 520-6723

Fifth Judicial District (Clear Creek, Eagle, Lake, and Summit counties)

District Attorney's Office
(303) 679-2453

Sixth Judicial District (Archuleta, La Plata, and San Juan counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 247-8850

Seventh Judicial District (Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 252-4266

Eighth Judicial District (Jackson and Larimer counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 498-7290

Ninth Judicial District (Garfield and Rio Blanco counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 384-3517

Tenth Judicial District (Pueblo County)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 583-6092

Eleventh Judicial District (Chaffee, Custer, Fremont, and Park counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 269-0170

Twelfth Judicial District (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, and Saguache counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 589-3691

Thirteenth Judicial District (Kit Carson, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 542-3473

Fourteenth Judicial District (Grand, Moffat, and Routt counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 629-3485

Fifteenth Judicial District (Baca, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Prowers counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 336-7446

Sixteenth Judicial District (Bent, Crowley, and Otero counties)

District Attorney's Office
(719) 384-8786

Seventeenth Judicial District (Adams and Broomfield counties)

District Attorney's Office
(303) 659-7720

Eighteenth Judicial District (Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert, and Lincoln counties)

District Attorney's Office
(720) 874-8607

Nineteenth Judicial District (Weld County)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 400-4748

Twentieth Judicial District (Boulder County)

District Attorney's Office
(303) 682-6801

Twenty-First Judicial District (Mesa County)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 244-1737

Twenty-Second Judicial District (Dolores and Montezuma counties)

District Attorney's Office
(970) 564-2755

* Based on a chapter originally written by Lisa Curtis, Denver District Attorney's Office, and updated by Robin Fudge Finegan, M.A., M.N.M., FEMA Region VIII.