

Fact Sheet

Senior Safety

There is a mistaken belief that seniors are more likely to be victims of crime compared to other members of the community. According to Queensland Police Service statistics, the likelihood of being a victim of crime significantly decreases with age. The lifestyle of seniors helps make their lives safer. They are more experienced and wiser; they are less likely to go out at night, tend to spend more time at home and are less likely to place themselves in high-risk situations.

Emotive statements by public figures and the media's tendency to highlight offences against older people can result in a disproportionate fear of crime amongst seniors. This unnecessary fear can lead to a lack of confidence about going out alone, whether it's on public transport or walking in the neighbourhood. It can also result in a decrease in quality of life, deterioration in health and social isolation. However, people who are actively involved in their communities tend to be more confident about their safety, have less fear of crime, and live longer.

Despite the low risk of seniors being victims of crime, it is important to be aware of safety risks and have practical strategies which enhance personal safety.

Safety and security at home

Feeling safe in your own home is essential to your health and wellbeing.

To protect your safety and security whilst at home, consider the following:

- Ensure your house number, doors and windows are visible from the road.
- Keep trees and bushes trimmed to minimise potential hiding places.
- Installing an alarm system in your home, particularly if you live alone, to help protect your home and enhance your feelings of safety.
- Maintain the appearance that the home is not vacant by bringing in the mail regularly and not leaving the bins out for extended periods of time.
- Installing a form of sensor lighting at all entries, along pathways, and near the garage and other outdoor structures.
- Ensure security doors and screens are locked and in good condition.
- Always store your keys out of view and away from external doors and windows and never leave your garage remote or a spare set of house or car keys in your car.
- Place your valuables out of sight, such as in a safe or a secured drawer.
- Only open your door to people you know and trust. You should use your peephole, door chain or a window to see who's at the door before opening it and always check the credentials of service repair people, salespeople and charity collectors.

- Ensure at least one door (screen or entrance) is locked when greeting strangers at the door. This creates a barrier between you and them.

Safety and security when out and about

Feeling confident when you are out and about in the community is vital to mobility, enjoying community life and recreational activities.

Some steps you can take to protect your safety and security when out and about include:

- Be aware of your surroundings. Especially when using your mobile phone.
- When shopping, avoid carrying large amounts of money and never leave your handbag, wallet or personal items unattended.
- Use ATMs located in public view where you can be seen by other people.
- If you're travelling on public transport, ensure you sit where you can see and be seen by the driver or guard. Always check timetables beforehand to avoid long waits.
- Avoid areas where you don't feel safe (e.g. short-cuts through parks or vacant land, or areas in darkness).
- Where possible, use busy, well-lit streets.
- Carry a mobile phone so you can call for help. Program in the phone numbers of a relative, neighbour,

close friend and the triple zero (000) emergency number.

Personal Safety Concepts

Right to safety

We all have the right to be safe. While it is important to be aware of and exercise this right, be mindful that you also have a responsibility for your own safety.

Adopting practical safety strategies can help reduce the risk of being a victim of crime and assist in responding effectively should safety be threatened.

Commitment

Being committed to your safety is fundamental to maintaining it.

Many people are more committed to the safety of their loved ones, often willing to take any action if those people are in trouble but lack the same level of commitment to their own safety.

Confidence and body language

Display an air of confidence, even if you bluff it! Body language can convey our thoughts reflecting fear or confidence. Stand tall with your head up, shoulders back, walk with purpose and make brief eye contact with passers-by. By appearing confident and comfortable in your surroundings, you decrease your attractiveness to potential offenders.

Awareness of surroundings

Being aware of what is happening around you will alert you to possible danger, enabling you to take action to avoid it. An awareness of your

surroundings will help you identify places or people who may help if needed.

Be assertive

Assertiveness is using direct and honest communication that demonstrates self-respect and respect for others. By communicating assertively in everyday situations, you are signalling to others that you are prepared to stand up for yourself and therefore do not present as an easy target for potential offenders.

Develop a safety network

It is important to develop a safety network of people you trust, who are easily contactable and can provide support and advice if you have a problem, or if you feel your personal safety is threatened. Your network can include relatives, friends, community groups, neighbours, work colleagues, your GP and police.

A support network increases your confidence and self-esteem and can have a positive impact on all aspects of your life. Having your own network of trusted people to talk with also helps you in being a good friend or network member for others.

Personal safety plan

A personal safety plan is comprised of safety strategies you choose to suit your lifestyle and abilities. It involves adopting simple preventative strategies (e.g. being aware of your surroundings and adopting positive body language) to reduce the risk of victimisation as well as strategies to respond if your safety is threatened

(e.g. calling for help or removing yourself safely from the situation). These strategies should become habits you develop as you routinely implement your plan.

Elder abuse

Elder abuse is any act within a relationship of trust which results in harm to an older person. It can be emotional, psychological, physical, sexual or neglect. It can happen to anyone, across all ethnic groups, all levels of education and all economic backgrounds. In Queensland, it is estimated that around 25,000 elderly people are abused each year by someone they trust.

Unfortunately, it is common for elder abuse to remain hidden and continue unsuspected. This is often due to feelings of guilt and shame, fear of retaliation and damaging family relationships.

REMEMBER

It is your right to feel safe. No senior should be subjected to any form of abuse, mistreatment, or neglect.

Elder abuse is vastly under-reported and, in most cases, committed by close family members. For that reason, it is important to know the signs of elder abuse. Some signs those at risk exhibit include:

- Unusual bruises or other injuries that are not explained
- Afraid of someone close to them
- Anxious or nervous

- Reluctant to talk or make eye contact
- Deferring another person to speak on their behalf
- Struggling to pay for bills, medication or necessities when they didn't previously
- Significant changes in appearance

If you or someone you know is experiencing elder abuse, there are options available for help and support.

If a crime is happening now call Triple Zero (000). If not, you can call Policelink on 131 444.

Alternatively, the Elder Abuse Helpline provides free, confidential advice, support and referral to anyone experiencing, suspecting or witnessing abuse. To contact the Elder Abuse Helpline call 1300 651 192.

Fraud and scams

Seniors are more likely to become victims of scams and fraud than any other crime. This is because seniors often have more money and accumulated wealth than younger people. They may also generally be less internet and computer savvy or less familiar with new technology.

Scams may be presented at a meeting, during a personal conversation, through mail/phone or over the internet. The most common scams targeting seniors include:

- Dating and romance
- Investment scams
- Unexpected prize & lottery scams
- Inheritance scams
- Rebate scams

A good defence to fraud is to be very suspicious of the opportunities presented and ask lots of questions. You can protect yourself from scams by:

- Being suspicious of requests for money.
- Being aware of unusual payment method requests.
- Verifying the identity of the contact by calling the relevant organisation.
- Being wary of people you meet on social media or online dating sites.
- Being suspicious of unexpected emails or letters regarding inheritance or competition prize.
- Doing your own research before you invest money.
- Keeping your personal details secure.

You can help others by reporting a scam to the appropriate authorities. The information you provide will help these organisations build a better picture of the latest scams and warn other people about what to look out for.

You can report scams to the ACCC via Scamwatch – visit scamwatch.gov.au

Useful safety contacts

Policelink: 131 444
 Emergencies (Triple Zero): 000
 Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000
 Seniors Enquiry Line: 1300 135 500
 DV Connect: 1800 811 811
 Elder Abuse Help Line: 1300 651 192

More Information:

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