



How to
protect
yourself

Bogus callers

Introduction

Fear of crime should not stop you enjoying life to the full. Overall, older people are less likely than other age groups to be victims of crime. However, one type of criminal may try to target older people.

Bogus callers, also known as distraction burglars, try to trick their way into your home so that they can steal your money and valuables while your attention is elsewhere.

Simple steps for safety at the door

This booklet contains a simple step-by-step guide for you to follow when answering your door.

Most callers are genuine and mean you no harm, but bogus callers can often seem very plausible and will try to fool you.

If you read this booklet carefully and follow the advice given, you will be less likely to be fooled and more likely to feel safe and secure at your door.

Password schemes

- ▶ **All electricity, gas and water companies have a doorstep password scheme.** If you haven't already done so, **set up a password with each of them today.** Choose passwords that are unique and you will remember.
- ▶ There is space on the **back cover** of this booklet to **write down details of your electricity, gas and water companies and the passwords you have set up with them.** **Keep this out of sight but where you can easily find it** – if you need to fetch it, only do so while the door is closed. You should also have received a sticker to place in your door or window warning off bogus callers and reminding you of what to do.

1 Safety and security in your home

- ▶ **Fit a door chain (and, where you can, a spy hole).** This makes it easier for you to identify who is at the door **without fully opening it**. If you do not currently have a chain, arrange to have one fitted as soon as possible.

Your local Age Concern group may be able to help you find a local home security scheme or a handy person who can do this job for you. See the **back cover** for details of how to contact your local Age Concern.

- ▶ **Do not keep large amounts of money in the house.** It is safer in a bank or building society account. Do not leave money lying around where it is visible from outside or where it can be easily found.
- ▶ **Do not leave valuable items in view or where they can be easily found.** Items of sentimental value, such as jewellery, may also be those that most appeal to burglars. It may be worth getting a small safe for your home.

2 Before you go to the door

Bogus callers often work in pairs. One of them will try to keep you talking at the front door while the other tries to get in through the back door or a window.

- ▶ **Close and lock the back door and any accessible windows – before you go to the front door.**
- ▶ **Take your time – don't be forced to make a decision.** It is your home and you can decide who comes in. Don't let any caller try to pressure you into making a quick decision. Think carefully first and if you are unsure, do not open the door.

3 Safety and security at your door

Look through your spy hole or window

- ▶ When someone knocks on your door or rings the bell, **try to check who they are before opening the door.** Think before you act – if you are concerned about what you see or hear, do not open the door.

Think – safety first

- ▶ Sometimes bogus callers pose as someone needing help – perhaps a glass of water or access to a telephone. **Put yourself first. Do not feel you are rude or uncaring by saying ‘no’ – your own safety is important.**

Check the caller is who they say they are

- ▶ Bogus callers will often say they represent an electricity, gas or water company or another organisation such as the council or a charity. **Follow the checklist opposite to check that a caller is who they say they are.**

Ask for the password you have set up with the company

- ▶ **All electricity, gas and water companies offer a doorstep password scheme.** Contact your companies and **set up a unique password with each of them** that you will remember. When a representative calls they will give you your unique password.
- ▶ There is space on the **back cover** of this booklet to **write down details of your electricity, gas and water companies and the passwords you have set up with them.** **Keep this out of sight but where you can easily find it.** Join your companies' password schemes now!

4 Your doorstep checklist

Is my door chain on?

- ▶ When you first answer the door, **keep your door chain on.**
- ▶ While checking the caller's identity, **keep your door chain on.**
- ▶ If you are unsure, **keep your door chain on, tell the caller you will check their identity with their company and close the door.**

Does the caller have an identification card?

- ▶ If the caller does not have an identification card, **keep the door chain on, ask the caller to go away and close the door. If the caller persists, dial 999 and ask for the police.**
- ▶ If the caller does have an identification card:
 - **ask to see the card** and check it carefully – keep your door chain on
 - **close the door while you examine the card** to see if it looks genuine
 - **does the card have an expiry date and is it still valid?**
 - **does the photograph on the card match the person at the door?**
 - **check the photograph is the original** – has anything been stuck over it?
- ▶ You are in control, you make the decisions. Remember, it is your home and you decide whom you let in. **If the answer to any of the above questions is no, or you are still unsure, do not open the door and do not let the caller in.**

5 If you are unsure do not open the door

Keep the door closed and the caller outside

A genuine caller will not object to you leaving them on the doorstep and closing the door, even if it is raining.

Do not use the telephone number on the caller's identification card

If the identification card is not genuine then the telephone number on the card will not be genuine either.

- ▶ **Find the company's telephone number in your phone book or on a bill, or call directory enquiries.**
- ▶ **Telephone the company and ask them to confirm they have sent someone out to you.**

The company will ask you for information about the identification card and what the caller looks like. The company may also ask for the date of birth or password of the caller.

- ▶ **If you need to, get more information from the caller with the door chain left on.**

Dial 999 if the company does not know the caller

- ▶ **Ask for the police and tell them what has happened.**
- ▶ **Tell the police if the caller is still at your door.**

The police will tell you what to do.

6 Rogue traders

Do not agree to any cold caller doing any work for you

Some cold callers will offer to do roofing, building or driveway resurfacing.

Some cold callers will vastly overcharge for unnecessary, shoddy or non-existent work.

Never accept an offer to drive you to withdraw money

There have been instances where older people have been driven to their bank or building society, to withdraw money to pay the cold caller's charges.

- ▶ **Do not accept an offer to be driven from anyone you do not know or do not trust.**
- ▶ **If you are pressurised to hand over money, keep your door closed, dial 999 and ask for the police.**

Need some work done?

- ▶ If you think you may need to have work done on your house or driveway, **ask for quotes from two or three reputable companies.** Friends and relatives may be able to recommend companies or tradespeople they have been pleased with.

Your local Age Concern group may also be able to provide lists of companies and tradespeople to help you. See the **back cover** for details of how to contact your local Age Concern.

Your utility companies

Use this space for details of your electricity, gas and water companies and the passwords you have set up with them.

My water supplier

Contact number

Doorstep password

My gas supplier

Contact number

Doorstep password

My electricity supplier

Contact number

Doorstep password

Further information

Age Concern produces free information on a wide range of issues affecting older people.

Visit our website www.ageconcern.org.uk or call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call) to:

- order a free copy of *Don't be fooled*, Age Concern's guide to common scams
- find out more about our other information materials
- find out how to contact your nearest local Age Concern.

This leaflet has been produced by Age Concern with the support of Thames Water.

Code: ACIL27

Date of publication: July 2008

© Age Concern England. All rights reserved

ACIL27