

Safety Tips

CARJACKING

Stealing a car by force has captured headlines across the country. Statistically your chances of being a carjacking victim are very slim, and prevention actions can reduce the risk even more.

Why is Carjacking a Problem?

No one knows for certain, but some explanations include:

- It's a crime of opportunity - a thief searching for the most vulnerable prey. Sometimes it's the first step in another crime.
- For some young people, carjacking may be a rite of passage, a status symbol, or just a thrill.
- Cars, especially luxury ones, provide quick cash for drug users and other criminals.
- Sophisticated alarms and improved locking devices make it harder for thieves to steal unoccupied cars.
- It's easy to buy, steal, or barter for guns in this country. And a pointed gun makes a powerful threat.
- More teens and adults commit crimes of violence than ever before.
- Intense media interest may have created "copycat" carjackers.

It can happen anywhere and to anyone

- Though carjackings can occur anytime, a sizable share appear to take place during the late night hours.
- Carjacking isn't just a problem in large cities - it happens in suburbs, small towns, and rural areas.
- Carjackers look for opportunity. They don't choose victims by sex, race, or age.

Golden opportunities: What do carjackers look for?

- Intersections controlled by stop lights or signs.
- Garages and parking lots for mass transit, shopping malls, and grocery stores.
- Self-serve gas stations and car washes.
- ATMs (automated teller machines).
- Residential driveways and streets as people get into and out of cars.
- Highway exit and entry ramps, or anyplace else that drivers slow down or stop.

The "Bump and Rob"

It works like this: A car, usually with a driver and at least one passenger, rear-ends or "bumps" you in traffic. You quickly get out to check the damage and exchange information. Either the driver or one of the passengers jumps in your car and drives off.



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- If you're bumped by another car, look around before you get out.
- Make sure there are other cars around, check out the car that's rear-ended you and who's in it. If the situation makes you uneasy, memorize or jot down the car's tag number and description; signal the other car to follow you. Drive to the nearest police station or to a busy, well-lighted area.
- If you do get out of the car, take your keys (and purse or wallet if you have one) with you and stay alert.

Reduce Your Risk

Getting In your car

- Walk with purpose and stay alert.
- Approach your car with the key in hand. Look around and inside the car before getting in.
- Be wary of people asking for directions or handing out fliers.
- Trust your instincts - if something makes you feel uneasy, get into the car quickly, lock the doors, and drive away.

Driving

- Keep your doors locked and windows rolled up (at least part-way, if it's hot and you don't have air conditioning), no matter how short the distance or how safe the neighborhood.
- When you're coming to a stop, leave enough room to maneuver around other cars, especially if you sense trouble and need to get away.
- Drive in the center lane to make it harder for would-be carjackers to approach the car.
- Avoid driving alone. Go with someone whenever possible, especially at night.
- Don't stop to assist a stranger whose car is broken down. Help instead by driving to the nearest phone and calling police to help.

Getting Out of your car

- Park in well-lighted areas, near sidewalks or walkways. Avoid parking near dumpsters, woods, large vans or trucks, or anything else that limits your visibility.
- Never leave valuables in plain view, even if the car is locked.
- Put them in the trunk or out of sight.
- Try to park in a garage with an attendant. Leave only the ignition key, with no identification.
- Even if you're rushed, look around before you get out and stay alert to the surroundings.

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If It Happens to You...

- If the carjacker threatens you with a gun or other weapon, give up your car. Don't argue. Your life is worth more than a car.
- Get away from the area as quickly as possible.
- Try to remember what the carjacker looked like - sex, race, age, hair and eye color, special features, clothes.
- Report the crime immediately to the police. Call 911.
- Know your license plate number and give a good description of your car.

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