

Information for carers

Doorstep crime and scams



What's it all about?

In your role as a care professional, a care worker or a carer you are in a unique position to help the person you care for from becoming a victim of doorstep crime and scams. The purpose of this pack is to offer you some information and assistance in carrying out this function. The following pages offer more detailed advice on what to look out for and what to do if you think that the person you care for has become a victim of doorstep crime or scams.

Research suggests that only one in ten of these sorts of crimes are reported and it is thought that the reason for this is that the people either do not realise that they are a victim or that they do not want to be seen as being unable to cope. Sometimes they feel embarrassed that they have fallen victim to such a crime.

Obviously, it is important to try and prevent someone from becoming a victim in the first place, but as victims are often re-targeted a number of times, it is equally important to assist the victim to break the cycle of victimisation.

You can help do this by:

- offering reassurance;
- encouraging good doorstep behaviour;
- empower the person you care for to deal with doorstep callers;
- keep money and valuables safe;
- keeping your eyes and ears open;

...but doing it in such a way that you do not increase the fear of crime. We hope the following pages will help in this.

Doorstep Crime

Every day people fall victim to doorstep crime. Most of the victims are elderly and vulnerable. In your role as a carer, you may be the only person that has regular contact with the person you care for and you can play a vital role in preventing them from becoming a victim.

Doorstep crime takes 2 forms:

- **Rogue Doorstep Selling**
- **Distraction Burglary**

Often the same criminals carry out both kinds of this crime - they are opportunists who will exploit their victims in the easiest and most profitable way possible.



Rogue Doorstep Selling

Although doorstep selling isn't illegal, buying from doorstep traders puts the householders safety and money at risk. Reputable businesses generally don't knock on doors to find customers. Rogue doorstep sellers will use a legitimate trade as a means to extract large sums of money from their victims. Such sellers will commonly offer to do work involving roofing, guttering, fascias, driveways and tree trimming. They may claim that roof tiles are missing or that a tree is unsafe and needs to be trimmed. They will often give a very low quote that will increase enormously when work begins.

All too often, they do little or no work. Any work they do carry out is unnecessary and of poor quality. They seek to extract large sums of money from their victims, sometimes driving them to the bank. They will often return on future occasions to get more money, particularly if they have identified the person as having money and being vulnerable.

Other doorsteps sales are likely to be mobility aids, household cleaning products or fish sellers. These types of sellers are often selling goods that are of no use or vastly overpriced. In the case of fish sellers there are concerns about the quality and freshness of the fish.

Often these callers will try to befriend their victims and develop a relationship that enables them to take advantage of them over period of weeks, months or even years. This means that it is very important to encourage the person you care for to report any matters to the police or Trading Standards, or to report them yourself.

What should I look out for?

- Work being carried out at the property that you were not expecting to see.
- Work that has been left uncompleted.
- Sales people who leave as you arrive.
- Large amounts of money being kept in the house.
- Being asked to take the person to the bank to draw out money.
- Traders who visit regularly over a period of time.



Questions to ask?

- Have you asked these people to call?
- Did you really want the work done, or the goods?
- Would you normally have agreed to this?
- Did you compare prices?
- What if it goes wrong?
- Can you really afford it?
- Can you contact the seller again?
- Will they give you a written contract and make you aware of your cancellation rights? (If the cost of the goods/service is over £42 you usually have fourteen days to cancel. If unsure contact Trading Standards who can give you further advice)
- Do you know why they are here?

Try to engage with the person you care for, but try not to alarm them, if you are in any doubt contact Trading Standards.

What if there is work that is needed

If the person you care for is in need of work doing, we have put together a list of top tips to use when offering advice.

- Ask them to work out how much they have to spend.
- Encourage them to ask family and friends for recommendations about tradesmen they have used in the past.
- Encourage them to get written quotations, not estimates, that can be changed in the future, and make sure that the quotations include all the items of work they want carrying out.
- Encourage them to make some basic checks themselves or you can on their behalf, for example, gas engineers should be registered with Gas Safe. If the trader says they are a member of a trade association or approved trader scheme then encourage the person you care for to check this before agreeing to have the work done.
- Remember the cheapest isn't always the best.
- Encourage them to discuss with the trader when the job will start and how long it will take to complete.
- Tell them to be clear about the work they want carried out – ask them to write out a specification.
- Encourage them to talk to the trader about what they expect - obtain a written work schedule before the job starts
- Tell them, if possible, to avoid paying deposits, especially large deposits and never pay the full amount up front.
- Encourage them to agree a payment schedule and stick to it, this is very important and will help to safeguard their money.
- Encourage them to take their time in choosing who does the work, they should avoid traders who want to rush them.

Where do I get help?

Doorstep calling should always be reported to Trading Standards via Citizen Advice Helpline on 0808 223 1133 or if immediate assistance is required to the Police on 999.

Distraction Burglary

Bogus callers will call at a house with the intention of tricking their way inside to steal money or valuables. Distraction burglars may be a man, a woman or even a child and they will use any story they can to try to gain access to the property. In a lot of cases the person who calls at the door will divert the householders attention while an accomplice enters the house to search for valuables. This may be from the rear of the property, so always encourage the householder to keep it locked at all times.

Distraction burglary should always be reported to the police. In an emergency call 999 and in other circumstances use the local police non-emergency number 101.

What advice can I offer?

Remember the simple advice STOP, CHAIN, CHECK.

- Before answering the door STOP, think, are you expecting a visitor – look out of the window or use the spy hole in the door to see who it is.
- Make sure the back door is locked before answering the front door.
- Apply the door CHAIN before opening the door.



CHECK the identity of the caller before removing the chain and letting the caller in. If you have any doubts who the caller is don't let them in. If you feel threatened or frightened phone 999.

What else could I do?

- Without causing fear or alarm make the person aware that not everyone who calls at the door is a genuine caller.
- Explain the tactics used by doorstep callers.
- Suggest to the person that they could use a nominated neighbour. (See the following sections)
- Make the person aware that they are never required to open their door to anyone and that it is not rude to shut the door and send someone away.

What can I do?

- Ensure that the person is encouraged to always keep the back door locked and look through the spy hole if they have one to see if they recognise the person.
- Encourage the person to set up passwords with the utility companies they use so that they can be sure that anyone claiming to be from one of these companies is who they say they are. (See the following sections)
- Bogus callers use the condition of the outside of a property to make a judgement about the person who lives there. Try and ensure that the outside of the property and garden are well maintained.

What do you mean “a list of useful numbers”?

Most reputable companies ensure that their representatives carry photographic identification. ID cards or badges usually carry a phone number that can be used to contact the company, but Trading Standards advice is to check the number in the phone book or yellow pages before the number is rung to check if it is genuine. Remember – reputable representatives will NOT mind their ID being taken and/or will often offer this to be checked.

What do you mean “a nominated neighbour”?

Where a person is particularly vulnerable it may be possible to nominate a neighbour to help identify callers at the door. When there is a knock at the door, the resident can show a card at the window telling the caller that the door will not be opened unless the caller’s identity has been confirmed by the neighbour, and giving directions to that neighbour’s house. However these details should not be left permanently on display in the window as this can advertise the vulnerability of the person living at the address.

Utility password schemes

Most utility companies operate a password scheme allowing the householder to register a password of their choice with the company. Once this is registered any caller from the company can be asked to provide the password before being given access to the property. If they cannot provide the password they are not from the utility company and should be told to leave. You can help the person you care for find the details of registering a password on their utility bills. If they cannot find the details the customer service department of the utility company will be able to help with registering a password.



Scams

Every year, three million people fall victims to scams, losing on average £850 per person. In some cases people have lost their entire savings.

A scam is a scheme designed to con someone and make as much money as possible for the scammer. Scams are becoming much more sophisticated and will often arrive by post, telephone, text message or email.

There are lots of different types of scams:

- Lotteries, Sweepstakes and Competitions.
- Catalogue and brochure scams.
- Clairvoyant Scams.
- Telephone Scams.
- Email Scam.

They all take many different forms but what they all have in common is that they begin with an unsolicited form of contact, whether by letter, text, phone call or email. There is always a promise, good luck, a prize, a tax refund or repairing the internet. There is always a catch, which usually involves the person paying money up front.

What is a chronic scam victim?

A chronic scam victim is someone who is targeted by lots of scams. This maybe because they are over trusting, socially isolated or suffer from a mental incapacity such as dementia. It often can start with them replying to one scam mailing. Their details are then sold on to other scammers and they get more letters and calls. Victims often end up losing their life savings, health and peace of mind.

What should I look out for?

- Lot of unwanted junk mail being delivered.
- Look out for letters which appear to be from Clairvoyants as this is a particularly unpleasant scam.
- Look out for cheap looking goods, such as jewellery, health products and toiletries samples.
- Lots of unexpected and unwanted phone calls from strangers.
- If they are secretive when discussing their finance with family or friends.

What advice can I give?

Some elderly people are too embarrassed to admit that they have fallen victim to a scam or may even be unaware they have been scammed. Criticising them could do more harm than good. Instead reassure them by explaining that it is a common problem and there are people who can help. Report any concerns you have to Trading Standards, officers can visit the person and help the person reduce their contact with scammers.

There are some practical things you can do to encourage them to protect themselves.

- Register with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) to reduce unwanted sales calls. Register for free on 0345 070 0707 or go to www.tpsonline.org.uk
- Register with the Mailing Preference Service (MPS) to reduce unwanted mail. Register for free on 0207 291 3310 or go to www.mpsonline.org.uk
- Register with the Fundraising Preference Service (FPS) to reduce unwanted charity contacts. Register for free on 0300 3033 517 or go to www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk

If the person you care for is reluctant to talk about the problem or will not accept advice do not give up. A scammer will not stop until all the victim's money has run out. If you think someone may be a victim of a scam contact Trading Standards for further help and advice.

Trading Standards

Tel: 01782 232065/237788

Email: public.protection@stoke.gov.uk

