



VICTIM
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The Impact of House Break-ins

An outline of the after effects of house break-ins.

Why does a house break leave victims feeling insecure and afraid?

Most people view their own home as a place of safety, where they can be assured of privacy and where they are in control of what happens.

Once a stranger deliberately enters someone's home, with the intention to cause damage or steal property, their home immediately feels unsafe. Privacy is invaded and what happens is taken out of a person's control. The loss of this normally "safe place" can leave victims of house break feeling generally vulnerable and insecure - both at home or elsewhere. Likewise, the feeling of privacy being invaded can leave behind feelings of violation and exposure. These feelings can be especially strong if very personal items such as photographs, diaries or clothing have been disturbed, damaged or stolen.

What happens after a house break?

The most common reaction following the discovery of a break-in is one of disbelief. Once the reality of the situation has sunk in, it is not uncommon for victims to tell themselves that "I never thought it would happen to me".

Following this initial disbelief, feelings of shock, anger, confusion and fear may arise.

These feelings may persist and at the same time, the victim also has to make a report to police, make a list of stolen property, contact insurance companies and organise to repair any damage. For those whose stolen property was uninsured there are added concerns about whether or not they can afford to replace what has been stolen. For some victims of burglary these tasks can be difficult and confusing.

Do different people react differently to house breaks?

People can be affected differently by house breaks.

Some common reactions are:

- anger and a focus on increasing household security.
- a focus on cleaning and reordering the house because of feelings of contamination and violation.

Families/residents of the house need to understand and talk about each other's different reactions, so they can be supportive of the other partner during this time of stress.

People who have recently suffered a loss or life crisis may have increased feelings of insecurity and fear. The break-in may add to existing feelings of loss.

Children may also have increased feelings of insecurity and fear, which might include difficulty going to bed, insisting that the lights be left on while they sleep, refusing to go to school or difficulties concentrating while at school.

How long will the feelings last?

For some victims of house break the feelings and reactions outlined pass within a few days. For others they may last for a few weeks and then slowly decrease. For a small group of people they may persist for an extended period of time.

There is no quick solution in dealing with the feelings that result after a house break. It is important to remember that the feelings outlined in this pamphlet are common reactions to a house break-in. Most people find it helpful to talk about their experience with someone they trust, such as a family member, friend or work mate. This can provide the necessary support to help recovery.

Anyone who has persistent distressing reactions can speak with a counsellor at Victim Support Service.

Call Your Police Local Service Area for Home Security Advice

Many police local service areas have a Community Programs Officer and also many local councils are involved in a range of crime prevention initiatives. For advice about home security, please contact your local police and our council.