



## **At 2 am, you wake to an intruder in your home. Here's how to keep your family safe.**

Blinking the sleep away from blurry eyes, you try to focus on the numbers on the clock. 1:57.

Annoyed at waking in the middle of the night, you let out a frustrated sigh and flip onto your other side to get comfortable. Maybe you can get back to sleep quickly.

Then you see it.

A man's silhouette standing at your bedroom door.

A thousand electrified needles prick your skin as your adrenaline surges. Panicked, you try screaming but your voice catches in your throat. Your lungs feel paralyzed. Your mind frantically races.

Who is this stranger in your home? What does he want?

And what should you do now?

Each year there are 2.5 million home burglaries. That's one every 26 seconds according to the FBI.

Having your home's sanctity and security breached by an unwelcome intruder is a feeling you don't soon forget.

Our home is our fortress. Our safe zone. We like to believe a break in will never happen to us. Unfortunately, it happens far too often. And since no two situations are the same, there isn't one simple answer.

There are, however, guidelines you can follow.

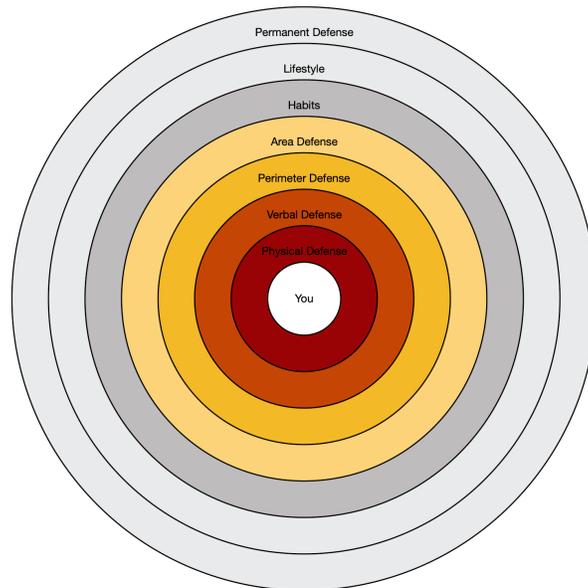
But before we cover what you should do when an intruder is in your house, let's take a step back.

## How to prevent a home invasion.

Like everything else in personal safety, the best self defense is avoidance. When it comes to a home break-in, the more you prepare,

- 1) the *less* likely you are to be victimized, and
- 2) the *more* likely you'll respond with appropriate action— rather than freeze— if your home is targeted.

Break in prevention generally covers layers 5, 6, and 7 of personal safety. Those layers are habits, lifestyle, and permanent defenses, respectively. If you aren't familiar with those terms, check out our article on the [7 layers of personal safety](#).



What's your first thought when you hear "burglary prevention"?

For most people, their mind turns immediately to security systems. And that's not an incorrect answer by any means. Security systems and cameras can be great deterrents. But there are also other tactics you can use to make your home a harder target.

For instance, plant thorny bushes underneath your windows. If you've fallen out of the habit of locking your doors and windows, re-create that habit each time you leave or go to bed. Many burglars enter through an unlocked door or window.

Some people count on dogs to deter intruders. While that may work, it doesn't always. A well socialized dog may not alert to a stranger. In fact, a student recently woke to find an intruder in the house. He later realized the man walked right by his sleeping dogs.

## **The break-in drill: Have a home invasion plan– and practice it.**

In a moment we'll get into what exactly you should do if an intruder is in your house. But knowing the information is worthless if you don't practice it.

Remember those fire drills you used to do in school?

I know. As far as you were concerned then, their best purpose was breaking up the monotony of class (especially when it happened in the middle of a test, right?).

But just like those drills ensured faculty could get students out of the building safely, so too does a home invasion drill ensure *you* can keep *your family* safe during a break-in.

By the time you finish reading this article, you'll know what steps your family plan should entail.



*Don't overcomplicate your home invasion plan. Simple is better when seconds count.*

It's important you establish a plan and make sure everyone in the house knows it. Practice it. Your plan should include adult division of responsibilities (such as what do about or with the kids), safe rooms, escape routes, and meet-up locations.

Remember, without a plan you're more likely to freeze in the moment than go into action.

A great home invasion plan reduces the number of choices you need to make under stress. As discussed in our article on [how to prevent the freeze response](#), the more choices you have to make, the less likely you are to make *any*.

Having said all that, let's take a look at what to do when an intruder is in your house.

No two families will have the same response plan. Why? Because every family is different, and each house is different. Generally speaking, however, we'll divide the scenarios into two parts:

- 1) A burglar in your house but not in your room, and
- 2) The intruder actually in your room.

### **What to do when a burglar is in your house, but not in your room.**

Many people I teach tell me if their first instinct on hearing an intruder would be to confront the person in an attempt to chase them away.

In certain situations, that may be the correct instinct. In fact, research suggests that 75% of burglars would abandon the house if they saw or heard people moving.

But...

A trapped burglar can become violent and dangerous if he fears getting caught. What begins as chasing someone out of your house could turn into a life or death struggle.

If you hear someone in your house, stay quiet. Now isn't the time to attract attention to yourself because you don't know for sure what they want.

Lock your door and listen. Can you tell how many intruders there are? Do you hear them talking about weapons or discussing their intentions? Call 911 and give the dispatcher as much information as possible. The sooner you call, the sooner police will get there.



Make sure you tell the dispatcher:

- 1)Who you are.
- 2)Where you live.
- 3)What is happening.
- 4)How many people you think are in your house who *shouldn't* be there.
- 5)How many people are home who *should* be there.
- 6)Where you will be in the home, or out if you have an escape route.

***What should you do about your kids while an intruder is in the house?***

What about your kids? If your house is large enough to move about without being seen, bring older kids into the safe room with you. You may also want to bring in younger children who can follow directions. However, for very young kids, your best course of action may be to simply lock their door and let them sleep.

Should you come face to face with the intruder while getting the kids, stay as calm as you can and keep your hands visible. Remember the **de-escalation tip of TACOS**, don't make eye contact, and speak softly.

If the intruder asked where your valuables are, whatever you do, *do not lie*. If he comes back angry because you lied, you've just escalated the situation.

Having said that, you can be tactical in telling him the truth. Is there somewhere you can send him in the house that allows you time to get out safely?

One last thing. Whatever you do, refrain from putting any ideas of leverage into the intruder's mind.

For example, don't say things such as "please don't hurt my kids/wife." Voicing such a concern gives him a weakness to exploit he may not have considered until you said it.

### ***Should you leave your safe room?***

#### **Tell 911:**

**WHO** you are  
**WHERE** you live  
**WHAT** is happening  
**HOW** many people  
**WHERE** you will stay

Once all of your family is in the safe room, do not leave until the police arrive. Even if you think the intruder is gone, stay put.

First, you may be wrong and end up in an unnecessary confrontation. Second, you don't want to be mistaken for the criminal when the police show up (remember, you told the dispatcher where you would be in the house).

Of course, if you believe yourself and family to be in imminent danger, leaving the safe room and escaping may be your best choice.

### ***Should you have a weapon in case the burglar finds you?***

While in the safe room, should you have a weapon? I don't believe there is a single correct answer; there's only a correct answer for you. There are pros and cons to both choices.

Here are some thoughts to consider and discuss with the other adults in your home.

If you don't have a weapon and the intruder makes his way into the safe room, can you defend yourself effectively?

If you do have a weapon and the intruder comes into the safe room, are you really willing to use it? If you hesitate, might your weapon incite him to use his?

In the event the intruder fights and takes your weapon away, would you know how to defend yourself against it?

Should you decide to have a weapon with you, keep it close. Ideally, you will have trained with that weapon under stress, and also know how to defend yourself against it (weapons are often taken away and used against their owner).

If your weapon is a gun, establish what is called a “fatal funnel” by placing yourself in a corner away from the door, allowing you to see the intruder before he sees you.

What if you don’t have a weapon, but feel in the moment you need one? Remember, any room in your house is full of weapons if you have knowledge of the **five types of improvised weapons**.

## **What to do if you wake up to an intruder already in your room.**

Upon waking to find an intruder already in your room, the previous section goes right out the window.

Once again, there is no single right answer because every situation is different. There are, however, options. Make sure you assess and practice your options in your home invasion plan.

If someone has put a hand on you while you slept, you have the right to fight back with any amount of force necessary, including deadly force.

The question becomes, should you?

If you just woke up and start fighting without taking stock of the situation, you may not realize the intruder has a weapon or a partner in the room.

That doesn’t mean don’t fight. Just take a moment and assess the situation the best you can before fighting.

Do you have a weapon handy, even if it’s a lamp or your alarm clock?

What about family in other parts of the house? Should you alert them, and how? Do they know what to do?

These are all considerations for discussion in your family plan.

What if you wake up and see someone in your room, but they’re preoccupied with taking your things?

As mentioned earlier, confronting them may cause them to flee. At the same time, you may startle them into using a weapon or becoming otherwise violent.

The better course of action might be staying quiet and observing them. Can you pretend to be asleep while looking for identifying features you could give police? If you decide this is your best option, stay still and quiet until you know they’re gone.

Once they leave, lock your door and immediately call 911.

Since you don’t know for certain if he’s left for good or coming back, now may be the time to revert to the prior section on dealing with an intruder in your house but not in your room.

## What should you do after a burglar has left your home?

Call 911 immediately, if you haven't already.

Then, get to a safe place and wait for police to clear the scene. If you have a safe escape route and you're 100% certain the intruder is gone, leave the house and let the 911 dispatcher know where you are going.

If you don't feel you can safely leave the house, lock yourself in the safe room and wait for police.

Once the police confirm it's safe, cooperate with them fully. Make a list of any items missing if you were robbed.

If the thief took electronics like computers or phones, change all of your account passwords—especially for bank accounts— and cancel your credit cards.



If your electronics have remote tracking capabilities like the Mac "Find Me" feature, let police know.

A disconcerting fact is that intruders often come back to the same house again. They may have seen something they want but didn't have time to grab.

Smart burglars also realize you will replace what he took before, often with bigger and newer (thus more valuable) items. As a bonus to them, they already know the entry and exit points.

While you can't change what has already happened, now is the time to look toward the future and assess how you can prevent further break-ins.

## Conclusion

How do you survive a home break-in while you're in the house?

There is never a single, simple answer because everyone's situation is different. However, there are proper ways to plan for such an unwanted event.

With proper prior planning, you ensure your home is a harder target. And if someone does come in, you're prepared to take appropriate action to preserve your family's safety.

Your plan begins with a look at your **7 layers of personal safety**- especially the last three layers of habits, lifestyle, and permanent defenses.

What better way to find weak points than hearing it from criminals themselves? KTVB7 in Boise, Idaho interviewed 86 burglars about how they broke into homes. You can read that article [here](#).

Remember, just like you would create a family plan for a house fire, create *and practice* a family plan for a home invasion.

Keep in mind there are two basic scenarios you should plan for. First, an intruder in your home but not in your room. Second is waking to find an intruder already in your room.

Nobody relishes the thought of a home invasion. But with this guide and some family discussion you can create a great plan to keep your loved ones safe during a break-in.