

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM PICKPOCKETS

The "art" of picking pockets is among one of the world's oldest professions. Author Charles Dickens' Artful Dodger is probably among the best known pickpockets. However, all are not juveniles - and all are not males!

The skilled pickpocket is not the seedy character you'd expect to find lurking in a dark doorway. He (or she) appears about as average as you and I in appearance and manner. Because they make a study of how to "blend" into the crowd, pickpockets usually remain undetected and can practice their activities with little hindrance.

Pickpockets follow no regular schedule. They operate equally well during daylight hours as well as at night. And if you have been led to believe that picking pockets takes place only in crowds, forget it! The only known fact is that they generally focus on the public during times when they might be carrying more money than usual, such as during pre-holiday spending sprees, store sales, at fairs, carnivals, horse races, gambling casinos, near bank entrances, etc.

While many pickpockets work alone, there are also teams of two or three which sometimes involves a female accomplice. A team with nimble fingers is next to impossible to apprehend. The first team member removes the valuables from the unsuspecting victim's pockets. He then secretly passes them on to the next member who quickly disappears. When a female member is also employed, she generally engages the victim in conversation to distract or delay his attention.

Contrary to what most think, experienced pickpockets do not place their hands all the way into the victims pockets. Rather, the expert criminal reaches into the top of the pocket, takes up a pleat in the lining, then makes a dozen or so more tiny pleats, folding the lining with swift dexterity between his fingers. The shortening pocket lining moves the valuables upward so that they emerge at the mouth of the pocket. The entire act takes place in a second or two.

The best protection for foiling pickpockets is to remove the opportunity of becoming a victim. . .

FOR MEN:

1. The target areas are back trouser pockets, and suitcoat and sports jacket pockets, located inside and out. A pickpocket who values his freedom avoids front trouser pockets, and

- especially buttoned or zippered pockets.
2. If it is necessary to carry your wallet in an unbuttoned pants, coat or jacket pocket, be sure it contains only what you can afford to lose. Keep large sums of money, credit cards, ID's, etc. in your front pocket or any buttoned or zippered pocket; keys on a chain attached to your clothing.
 3. Never "pat" your pocket to see if your wallet is still there. This notifies the criminal of the location of your valuables.
 4. Larger size "pocket secretaries" are especially inviting to pickpockets - and relatively easy to steal.

FOR WOMEN

1. Do NOT carry your wallet in your purse. Conceal it in a coat or sweater pocket where it does not show a bulge.
2. Use a purse that is difficult or time consuming to open.
3. Never let your purse lie unattended on a store counter or in a grocery shopping cart.

If you have been victimized by a pickpocket, immediately notify police and give the best description you can.