

TCC Tip: Carjacking Prevention

Reduce the chances of being carjacked with some simple advice.
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Law enforcement agencies agree that carjacking is a crime of opportunity - and a relatively new crime, too. The U.S. Department of Justice did not identify or maintain statistics for the crime until 1987. Many law enforcement agencies are only now placing firm definitions on what the crime carjacking is and keeping track of statistics for the crime. By some estimates, there are up to 50,000 attempted carjackings each year in the U.S.

Once you've been targeted, it's almost time to surrender your vehicle. But you can significantly reduce the chances of being singled out as a victim if you follow some careful advice:

Common tactics of carjackers

Carjackers will look for people in vulnerable situations, or they will try to get people in vulnerable situations. Here are some typical ones:

Stalled car. The carjackers will park a 'stalled' car along the side of the road in a relatively low traffic area at night, waiting for an unsuspecting victim to pull over and offer help. They will then force the owner to hand over the keys.

Bump and run. Two or more carjackers in another car will follow you and then bump into the back of your car at the opportune time. When you get out to survey the damage and talk to them, one or two of the carjackers will forcibly take your car.

Flying, fundraising, or panhandling. Carjackers will sometimes pose as homeless people, lost people seeking directions, or windshield washers, all in hopes of getting your guard down and seizing the moment when there's no one else around.

Direct intimidation. The carjacker will simply walk up to your vehicle and get your attention by waving a gun or other weapon at the window-or by reaching in or getting in the vehicle if you have your windows open or doors unlocked-hoping that you will surrender your vehicle.

Common sense carjacking prevention

Probably the best advice to prevent carjacking is just to stay alert and aware of your surroundings. Here are some specifics:

Avoid driving alone. Driving with a passenger almost entirely eliminates the chances of being carjacked, but don't ignore the other advice.

Take precautions in parking. Where you're parked does make a difference. In any type of parking lot or parking building, choose an area near the building entrance or parking attendant, and a spot that will be well lighted at night. Keep an eye out for bushes, dumpsters, or large vehicles that people could be hiding behind. Walk with someone if possible, take the elevator rather than the stairs, and don't take any more

time unlocking or loading the car than you need to. But always check inside the car before you enter. Backing into the space is generally better, because it gives you a better chance of being able to make a quick exit.

Keep your doors locked and windows up. Always drive with the doors locked, and keep the windows up at least most of the way. Having power locks helps assure all the doors are locked.

Be especially careful when in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Most carjackings occur away from the victim's home neighborhood. If you're lost, don't pull over reading the map. Keep driving to a public place and ask for directions.

Don't stop to assist other motorists in a deserted area. It may sound rude to ignore stranded motorists, but this is a potential carjacking tactic. Inform the police about the situation as soon as possible.

Stay visible. Carjackers will opt to choose people who are in a position that won't likely be seen by bystanders. Park in high-visibility spots.

Always leave a way out. At stoplights, always leave a car length between you and the vehicle ahead so that you can maneuver around it in a hurry to get out of a potential carjacking situation.

Don't place valuables in view. Place any objects of value in the trunk, glove box, console, or underneath the privacy shelf in hatchbacks and wagons.

Keep moving. If you see suspicious-looking loiterers around an intersection ahead, try to adjust your speed so you will still be moving as you go through the traffic light. If there's a stop sign, only come to a rolling stop if you feel insecure, once you're sure there's no other traffic coming. It's better to have to explain your move to a police officer later on than to be carjacked.

If you suspect you're being followed, never drive home. Drive to the nearest police station, or to a well-lighted public place like a hospital, then honk your horn for the attention of others and call the police from your cell phone if you have one.

If you are targeted...

If the tactics above just didn't work - or you let your defenses down - and the carjacker is determined to have your car, this is not the time to be a hero!

Don't fight. Give up your car. If a carjacker has forced his way into your vehicle, or if he/she is waving a gun, don't try to resist the carjacker. Give up your vehicle and keep your own life. Property can be replaced, but your life cannot.

If you have a child in the car... Sometimes carjackers will take off in cars, not realizing until later that there is a small child still in the back seat. This is usually bad news for the carjacker, too, who isn't sure what to do with the child and doesn't generally have abduction in mind (which sometimes causes them to abandon the vehicle miles away with the child still in it). If you're carjacked, let the carjackers know that you have a small child in the car and reason for the child's release.

Stay alert!

The important theme in this advice is: Stay alert and don't let your defenses down. Carjackings don't fit our typical stereotypes: Men are far more likely to be carjackers than women, but men are also more likely than women to be the victims of carjackings; those under 35 years old are more likely to be victims than older motorists. Carjackings are more likely to occur at night, yet about one third of all carjackings are during daylight hours. And don't think that just because you drive an old beater you won't be singled out by carjackers. According to the most recent set of national data, the median value of vehicles carjacked is only about \$4000. Many carjackers are committing the crime just for the thrill of doing so, for initiation rites into a gang, or because they want what's in your car.

Though there are exceptions, carjacking is usually a crime of opportunity. Don't give them the chance.