

Break-in and thefts in early learning.

A break-in and the theft of items can have a devastating impact on an early learning service. Not only can missing goods and property damage make running the business challenging, but people's sense of safety and security may be impacted.

Unfortunately, early learning services can be seen as easy targets for thieves. This is in part due to the lengthy periods of closure over holidays as well as storing on the premises small items which are easy to steal and sell, such as phones, cameras, and tablets. It's therefore vital that all early learning services consider what they can do to better protect their business from break-ins and thefts.

Doors, windows and locks

While it sounds obvious, services need to ensure that at the end of each day, all windows and doors are fully closed and locked. It can be easy to overlook some windows, particularly in large buildings, yet open windows are an invitation to opportunistic thieves.

All locks on doors and windows should be high quality, making it hard to force them open. It can come as a surprise to some business owners when they realise

how easy it is to break-in through locked windows and doors. Security screens on windows and doors should be considered to provide additional protection as well as protective films on windows, which makes them harder to smash.

Maintain a register of who has keys and/or swipe passes to the premises, and they should only be provided to those who need them. Ensure there's a process of retrieving keys from staff or contractors who leave or no longer require them. If there are concerns about missing, lost or stolen keys, use this as a time to change all locks and keys and update the register.

Items outside a service can sometimes make it easier for burglars to enter a building. Assess what you have outside in terms of furniture and play equipment and consider how these items might assist someone to break-in. Is there anything that'll help someone climb up to a window or other access point? Is there something that'll help smash a window? Where possible, move these items further away from the building or inside, especially over lengthy holiday closure periods.

Monitoring systems

Surveillance cameras in and around your service can operate as a deterrent for any would-be thieves. Posting signage about the presence of these cameras around the premises lets thieves know they're going to be caught on camera.

If installing surveillance cameras, staff and parents should be made aware of this and where in the centre they'll be. Cameras mustn't be placed in areas requiring privacy, such as the toilets or nappy change locations. To be sure you're complying with federal and state privacy laws, go to business.gov.au/people/customers/install-video-surveillance-for-guidance.

Keep in mind that, sadly, security cameras can be targets for damage and theft. So where possible avoid placing them in easily accessible locations.

Sensor lights are another effective tool for deterring thieves. Lights, both inside and out, that go on when movement is detected, can both startle and encourage thieves to leave as well as draw attention to them.

Storage of valuable items

Valuable items should be stored in locked locations, out of sight of anyone moving around the service. Break-ins aren't always planned; some occur when an easy opportunity presents itself. Keeping items stored securely makes stealing them more challenging.

When using lockable cabinets or safes for valuable items, consider how secure those storage devices are. Are lockable cabinets of a high quality that makes the locks hard to force open? Are safes bolted down so they can't be tipped, damaged or stolen?

It isn't only items inside a service that are stolen; those kept outside, such as furniture and equipment, can also be a target. And unfortunately, sometimes an easy target when kept in plain sight. Consider how and where these items are stored, to make it harder for thieves to gain access to them. This might involve an outdoor storage unit or where possible, bringing items inside.

Storage and handling of cash

Cash is obviously a common item to be stolen and unfortunately can create an easy temptation for some people.

Any service that receives and stores cash should have a cash handling policy to ensure appropriate processes are in place. This policy should cover areas such as staff responsibilities, safety and security measures, fraud prevention and detection and safe storage of cash.

Any cash held on site should be locked away securely in a safe. And where possible, cash should be banked daily.

Asset register

A detailed and current asset register is a must for all early learning services for several reasons.

If a theft has occurred, an asset register will make it easier to quickly determine what's been stolen. During a stressful situation, it's hard to think of everything the business owns and what's missing. An asset register means you aren't relying on memory.

An asset register also assists in ensuring all assets are insured. Underinsurance is unfortunately common in Australia. If the insurance level doesn't cover the items stolen or damaged, businesses need to cover the difference.

Staff training and support

The safety and security of the service isn't just the responsibility of senior management; it's something all staff should be a part of. Discuss with staff the role they can play in keeping the centre safe and encourage them to speak up if they have concerns. Be sure security processes are discussed with all staff, so they know what's expected of them.

What to do if a theft occurs

If your business has fallen victim to a theft, immediately dial 000 to report the incident to police. Be sure to not disturb

the scene before police arrive as this will likely hamper their investigation. And prioritise the safety of you and your staff, keeping in mind the burglar might still be present.

Contact your Guild Insurance account manager or insurance advisor to inform them of the incident. Don't wait until you have the full story of exactly what's happened and what's been taken; report the matter as soon as you can to get the process started.

When it's safe to do so, create a list of all that's been stolen and damaged using your asset register as a guide. This information will be needed by both police and your insurance company.

While experiencing a break-in and theft can be devastating, it can be used as an opportunity to assess the service's processes and security and make some improvements. Assess how the intruder gained entry; was it too easy? Also consider how your service responded to the situation; did all staff know what to do?



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