

# Don't let them pocket it



You may have an idea of what a pickpocket looks like but they're far less likely to stand out in a crowd than you might think since blending in is part of how they avoid being caught. Here's how to spot a potential pickpocket and avoid losing your belongings to one.

## How to spot a pickpocket

### *The observers*

These include people loitering in public places who appear to be checking out passers-by, paying particular interest to their handbags, shopping bags and where they might place their wallet or purse.

For example, be aware of individuals who appear to be focusing their attention on the waist area of others. This may be an indication of criminal intent and probable theft. But do bear in mind the fact that some people are naturally shy and do avoid eye contact. Always follow your instincts.

### *The opportunists*

Pickpockets also operate in shops and department stores, where people are more likely to be standing still, distracted and so paying less attention to their belongings, making them an easier target.

Be more aware of your surroundings in busy shops and shopping centres because they're ideal places for pickpockets, as it's easier for them to brush past people, take items and blend into the crowd.

### *Team tactics*

Pickpockets don't always operate alone, they may work in teams to distract the target while someone unseen removes the items and blends back into the crowd. Another member might step in as an enforcer in the event of an altercation.

### *Crowding in*

Thieves vary their tactics based on the location and the density of the crowd. One tactic is where a group of them push up against a victim in a crowded shop or street then quickly reach into the victim's pocket and steal their wallet, phone or purse.

### *Dirty tricks*

Remember, pickpockets are very skilled at what they do. They know all the tricks and are extremely light-fingered with most of their thefts only taking a second or two. One of their tactics is 'hugger mugging' where a thief will appear to be over-friendly for no particular reason and hug you while pickpocketing you.

### *The point of distraction*

Pickpocket teams are adept at creating distractions. This could be anything from a game to a loud shout, all designed to avert your attention while an unseen accomplice steals your valuables. So do try not to be easily distracted.

## **Are you a prime target?**

### *Dos*

- Do keep purses and bags closed and secure at all times.
- Do carry bags in front of you or diagonally across your chest.
- Do return cards to your purse or wallet quickly and zip it up or button it.
- Do use a purse that's difficult to open. One that zips or snaps shut is best, and keep it closed.
- Do use a money belt if you're carrying a significant quantity of cash.
- Do conceal your wallet in a buttoned or zipped pocket where it doesn't bulge.
- Do keep a list, separate from your wallet and phone, of contact numbers of family in case your phone is stolen.
- Do keep a photocopy of your airline tickets, passport, credit cards and any other documents that would be impossible or inconvenient to replace if stolen.

### *Don'ts*

- Don't hang stuff on the back of a chair.
- Don't leave anything on the back of a pushchair.
- Don't place your belongings out of sight on the floor.

Remember, having a zipped bag doesn't mean you're totally safe. Thieves have been known to walk behind victims while slowly unzipping bags. Yes, they can be that bold. So, never underestimate a pickpocket.