

HOW SHOPLIFTING AFFECTS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

One of the most common non-violent crimes facing America today—and most of the world—is shoplifting. So prevalent is this problem, that most stores and shops automatically increase prices (as much as 10%) to cover these losses.

Shoplifters fall into several categories. First, there are the "professionals." They make their living by stealing—most often to their "customers'" specifications. Techniques they use to operate are to remove labels with scissors or razor blades that could incriminate them if caught, by designing a "booster" box for stolen articles, the expert use of "bad bags" (shopping bags), or "booster" skirts or pants (ordinary appearing garments with baglike compartments inside), plus dozens of other clever "professional's tools."

Some take things they could easily pay for and perhaps do not even want. These offenders may suffer from kleptomania, a neurotic, irresistible compulsion to steal. While these people may not necessarily be considered mentally ill, generally "kleptomaniacs" are emotionally disturbed.

The greatest number of shoplifters are "amateurs." Usually, they have little money, few scruples and an intense desire to own luxuries. Psychologists say the four most common urges and emotions underlying these crimes are: 1) profound feelings of guilt; 2) a wish to be punished; 3) a need to prove their worth, and/or 4) an impulse to retaliate for real or fancied wrongs. These shoplifters are not necessarily ill or disturbed, they simply steal because it pays.

Whether the item taken is of little value (as a candy bar or piece of bubble gum), or of greater worth (a watch or a camera), it is *still* shoplifting (theft) and it is *still* a crime. These crimes affect us all by being forced to pay higher prices.

How TO TELL IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE SHOPLIFTERS

No matter how young children are, they must be taught that to take anything without paying for it is a wrongful act. If a child does not realize this at an early age, it may set a pattern that could follow him or her into adulthood, with disturbing consequences.

The simplest way to prevent a child from stealing is to watch him or her at all times while you are shopping and immediately reprimand when the act takes place. If this fails, take the child to the store manager or other authoritative personnel and say something like, "My child took this. Will you please explain what happens to people who steal."

Naturally, it is a more serious problem when teenagers and adults engage in shoplifting. A friend or family member may be extremely secretive, but if they engage in shoplifting regularly, there are usually giveaway clues as to their activities: 1) extra unexplained income; 2) possession of luxuries you know they cannot afford, 3) secretive habits during certain times of the day, and/or 4) lavish gifts for friends and acquaintances.

WHEN YOU DISCOVER A SHOPLIFTER

If it's a stranger in the illegal act, notify store personnel.

If it's a friend or family member, warn him or her first. If this fails, tell someone in their family. As a last resort, you may have to notify police.