

Lesson 14: Crime & Safety

Welcome to Lesson 14 of the Everyday English Speaking Course! This lesson will teach you vocabulary for talking about crime and safety.



Conversation #1 – Talking about Crime

Harry: Did you hear about the horrible crime in Detroit?

Rachel: No, what happened?

Harry: Some guy kidnapped two teenage girls and kept them locked up for over a year, raping and beating them constantly.

Rachel: That's awful! Those poor girls. How'd they escape?

Harry: A deliveryman heard screams coming from inside the house and called the police. They arrested the guy and rescued the girls. He's going to be charged with attempted murder, since he was threatening to kill them.

Rachel: I hope he gets sentenced to life in prison. I don't know what this world's coming to - even my own neighborhood isn't safe anymore. There have been a few break-ins on my street, and some of my neighbors have been mugged.

Harry: Luckily it's pretty safe where I live - the worst that happens is an occasional act of vandalism or trespassing, usually by some mischievous teenagers.

Rachel: Did you know I'm related to a convicted criminal? My uncle was found guilty of insurance fraud five years ago.

Harry: Wow. Did he have to serve time?

Rachel: No, he just had to pay a fine of about \$50,000.

Harry: Crime definitely doesn't pay.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

Several crimes are mentioned in this conversation. Let's learn about the different types of crimes, with example sentences of how you can talk about each one.

Violent crime includes crimes that injure or kill someone:

- **armed robbery = stealing things from a house, business, or bank while using weapons**

verb: rob

person: robber

"There was an armed robbery at the jewelry store on Main Street. The robbers had automatic weapons. After robbing the store, they escaped in a getaway car."

- **assault = physically attacking someone**

verb: assault

person: assailant/attacker

"A woman was assaulted while walking home from work. The assailant beat her up with a baseball bat."

- **murder = killing someone with intention**

verb: murder, kill

person: murderer, killer

"The murderer was an unemployed man in his mid-40s. He killed his wife in order to get her life insurance money."

- **kidnapping = taking someone and keeping them prisoner against their will**

verb: kidnap

person: kidnapper

"The son of a famous actor was kidnapped last week. The kidnappers are demanding ten million dollars in ransom."

- **rape / sexual assault = having sexual relations with someone when that person doesn't want to**

verb: rape

person: rapist, attacker

"Laura's testimony helped convict the rapist. He had raped her multiple times."

- **mugging = stealing from a person in a public place**

verb: mug

person: mugger, thief, robber

"I was mugged on the subway – the robber took my cell phone and wallet."

White-collar crimes usually involve information or money, but they don't physically injure anyone:

- **fraud = providing dishonest information so that you can get some advantage**

verb: commit fraud

person: fraudster

adjective: fraudulent

"Due to voter fraud, the election results were deemed invalid. Members of one political party presented fraudulent documents in order to vote multiple times for their favorite candidate."

- **identity theft = using someone else's personal information to your advantage**

verb: commit identity theft, steal someone's identity

"Someone stole my identity and took out a loan in my name. I should have taken better precautions against identity theft."

- **tax evasion = illegally avoiding paying taxes to your country's government**

"The CEO of the company was charged with tax evasion."

- **bribery = illegally giving someone money in exchange for a special favor**

verb: bribe

"Larry tried to bribe the police officer to let him go without a speeding violation – but the officer arrested him for attempted bribery."

- **blackmail = threatening a person in order to manipulate him or her**

verb: blackmail

person: blackmailer

"The journalist blackmailed the celebrity into giving him an exclusive interview by threatening to post embarrassing photos online."

Misdemeanors are less serious crimes:

- **shoplifting = stealing something from a store**

verb: shoplift

person: shoplifter, thief

"I shoplifted a few times when I was a teenager. I got away with it, but nowadays most stores have security cameras to help prevent shoplifting."

- **drug possession = having illegal drugs (cocaine, heroin, LSD, etc.)**

"The musician was arrested for drug possession; police found a pound of cocaine in his car."

- **vandalism = damaging public or private property**

verb: vandalize

person: vandal

"Vandals smashed all the windows in the church, and the new statue in the park was also vandalized. This town has a real problem with vandalism."

- **trespassing = entering another person's property without their permission**

verb: trespass

person: trespasser

"Security guards caught a man suspected of trespassing on government property – but it turned out he was a legitimate government official, not a trespasser."

- **drunk driving (DUI) = driving under the influence of alcohol**

verb: drive drunk, drive under the influence

person: drunk driver

"A lot of people are arrested for drunk driving on New Year's Eve. Last year, I saw a drunk driver run three red lights and cause an accident."

The conversation also includes various verbs used to talk about crimes:

- **attempt (a crime) - try to do it**

"He attempted to kidnap the daughter of a politician."

"Police are investigating an attempted break-in at the museum."

- **be arrested for (a crime) - get caught by the police and taken to jail**

"Two suspects were arrested for assault."

"The policeman arrested the shoplifter."

- **be accused of (a crime) - have someone say that you did it**

"The teacher was accused of sexually assaulting one of his students."

"The businessman accused his partner of blackmail."

- **be charged with (a crime) - be officially accused through the legal process**

"He'll be charged with attempted murder."

- **be suspected of (a crime) - have people think that you did it**

"Jonas is suspected of embezzlement."

- **be acquitted of (a crime) - have a judge or jury decide that you're innocent**

"Jonas was acquitted because there was no evidence."

- **be convicted of (a crime) - have a judge or jury decide that you're guilty**

"My uncle was convicted of insurance fraud."

- **serve time for (a crime) - go to prison because you did it**

"She served six months for drunk driving."

- **witness (a crime) - see what happened**

"There were no witnesses to the kidnapping."

"I witnessed a mugging in Times Square."

- **be a victim of (a crime) - have a crime done to you**

"Many rape victims are afraid to report the crime."

"Have you ever been a victim of identity theft?"

Finally, let's learn phrases for talking about **punishments** for crime:

- **"He received the death penalty."**

= He was executed

- **"He was sentenced to life in prison."**

- **"He was sentenced to five years in jail."**

A more informal way to say it is "He got five years."

- **"He had to pay a fine."**

- **"He had to do community service."**

- **“He got off with a slap on the wrist.”**

This expression means that the punishment was much “lighter” than the crime.

Conversation #2 – Reporting a Crime

Mary is visiting another city, and her purse is stolen while she’s shopping for souvenirs.

Mary: Stop! Thief! Where’s the nearest police station?

Woman: On Fifth Avenue – two blocks that way.

(at the police station)

Officer: How can I help you, ma’am?

Mary: My purse was stolen.

Officer: When and where did this happen?

Mary: Five minutes ago, in front of Joe’s Souvenir Shop on Third Avenue.

Officer: Can you describe the robber?

Mary: It was a short white guy, probably in his twenties. He was wearing jeans, a grey T-shirt, and a baseball cap.

Officer: Was he armed?

Mary: No, I don’t think he had a weapon. He just snatched my purse off my shoulder and ran away. It all happened so fast.

Officer: Can you describe your bag and tell me what was in it? Documents, cash, personal items?

Mary: It’s a medium-sized brown leather purse with two short straps. There was my wallet with about a hundred bucks in cash and two credit cards, my driver’s license, and a Samsung cell phone. Good thing I left my passport in the safe at the hotel.

Officer: Okay ma’am, I’ll just need you to fill out this form and sign here. You should call your bank and cancel the credit cards. I’ll let you know if your belongings turn up.

(if your belongings turn up = if your possessions are found)

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

This dialogue begins with Mary shouting “Stop! Thief!” Here are some other phrases you can use in emergencies:

- **“Call the police!”**
- **“Somebody help me!”**
- **“Leave me alone!”**
- **“Go away!”**

To report the crime, Mary says “My purse was stolen.” Many English learners confuse the words rob, thief, and steal – [click here](#) for an explanation of the differences between them. Additional ways to report a crime include:

- **“My _____ was stolen.”**
 - wallet / bag / backpack / passport / cell phone
- **“I’d like to report a theft.”**
- **“My _____ was broken into.”**
 - car / house / apartment / office
- **“I’ve been...”**
 - mugged / raped / robbed

The police officer asks Mary to describe the robber. You can [click here](#) for a detailed lesson on describing a person’s physical characteristics.

Finally, what are some tips for protecting yourself from becoming a victim of a crime?

- **“Keep your valuables in a safe.”**
- **“Always lock your door.”**
- **“Install a burglar alarm / car alarm.”**
- **“Carry only as much money as you need.”**
- **“Be aware of your surroundings.”**
- **“Don’t let a stranger into your car / home.”**
- **“At night, try to walk in well-lit areas.”**

Quiz – Lesson 14

1) After a rich businessman was _____, it took three weeks of negotiations before he was released.

- A. kidnapped
- B. stolen
- C. theft

2) Let's resolve this problem at the police _____.

- A. center
- B. office
- C. station

3) You can't lie about your qualifications on a job application! That's a form of _____!

- A. blackmail
- B. fraud
- C. vandalism

4) He was _____ to life in prison.

- A. arrested
- B. convicted
- C. sentenced

5) The bank _____ wore black masks to hide their faces.

- A. assailants
- B. robbers
- C. trespassers

6) Three people were killed in the gang shoot-out. Police have informed the families of the _____.

- A. murderers

- B. rapists
- C. victims

7) I lost my cousin in a horrible car accident - he was hit by a _____ driver.

- A. alcoholic
- B. drunk
- C. drugged

8) Can I borrow \$10? My wallet was _____ and I don't have enough money for a taxi to the police station.

- A. raped
- B. stolen
- C. shoplifted

9) The government building was _____ by a group of protesters.

- A. assaulted
- B. bribed
- C. vandalized

10) Be careful - a number of tourists have been _____ in that area.

- A. armed
- B. mugged
- C. stolen

11) If she is _____ of tax evasion, she could get up to ten years in prison.

- A. acquitted
- B. convicted
- C. witnessed

12) I've received several speeding tickets this year - each one with a \$75 _____.

- A. fee
- B. fine
- C. tax

13) Somebody _____ our house while we were on vacation. They took our TV and computers.

- A. arrested for
- B. broke into
- C. served time in

14) Tanya _____ her ex-boyfriend of abusing her daughter. Police are investigating.

- A. accused
- B. charged
- C. sentenced

15) Don't forget to _____ the doors of your car - this is a dangerous part of town.

- A. alarm
- B. lock
- C. secure

Lesson 14 Quiz - Answers

1.A 2.C 3.B 4.C 5.B 6.C 7.B 8.B 9.C 10.B 11.B 12.B 13.B 14.A 15.B