

Shoplifting

When you and your friends are shopping, do you get irritated or angry because you can only take three pairs of jeans into the dressing room? The ring you wanted to look at is locked in a case? You have to check all your packages at the door? Sales clerks watch you and your friends suspiciously as you look around?

Shoplifting is an expensive problem that everybody pays the price for. It hurts you in several ways — prices keep going up as store owners try to recover some of their losses. A big department store can spend millions a year on security, but it may lose as much as \$2,000 a day to shoplifters. And shoplifters give teenagers a bad name.



Who shoplifts?

- Teens — About 24 percent of apprehended shoplifters are teens between 13 and 17 years old.
- Amateurs make up the largest number, not professional thieves. These are "everyday" people who steal on impulse, because they see an item they greatly desire, or for a thrill. They tend to believe they won't get caught or sent to jail.
- Most are customers who steal frequently from places where they regularly shop.
- Some are professional thieves who make their living by stealing and selling goods, but this is a much smaller group than the amateurs.
- Drug addicts steal to support their habit.
- Desperate people steal because they need food — but they make up only a very small number of shoplifters.
- Kleptomaniacs, a tiny minority of shoplifters who have a mental disorder that makes it difficult to overcome their urge to steal.

Why Do People Shoplift?

Many want to see if they can get away with it. Some use the excuses, "This is a big store, they can afford it," "I don't have enough money," or "Stores just write it off as a business expense." Many teens shoplift on a dare, thinking their friends will call them "chicken" if they don't go along with the dare. Other teens are just looking for excitement.

Costs for the Individual Teen Who Shoplifts

- When salespeople or security officers catch shoplifters, they call the police, who then arrest the suspects and take them to the police station.
- Children and teens may be released into their parents' custody if it's their first offense.
- The case may be referred to a juvenile office, which can recommend an appropriate punishment, or sent directly to the juvenile court where a judge decides the penalty.
- Everyone will find out about the arrest because police or court officers will interview the shoplifter's parents, neighbors, and school while they're writing the report on the crime.
- If teens are caught shoplifting, their juvenile police records are supposed to be confidential and unavailable to future employers, but sometimes that information does get out.

Costs for Teenagers in General

- They are affected by the higher prices caused by shoplifters. A store owner loses money every time an item is stolen and has to raise prices to compensate for that loss. Store owners also have to spend additional money for special security measures, such as security guards and electronic monitoring.
- There may be fewer jobs available to teens if store owners lose money to shoplifters — owners won't generate enough profit to pay employees.

- Teens who shoplift may also cause problems for their friends and classmates who want to shop or get jobs. Because some store owners see teens as people who are likely to steal, they may not want teens in their stores.
- Teen shoplifting puts a strain on relationships between all other teens and store owners. Some stores have policies that restrict the number of teenagers who can enter the store at one time.
- Some people in the community may hold a negative opinion about teens in general because incidents of teen shoplifting they hear about.

What Happens in Your Community

- A neighborhood store closes because the owner loses too much money to shoplifting. (Thirty percent of business failures in the United States are due to shoplifting and employee theft.)
- A store victimized by shoplifting has to lay off employees because revenue is very low.
- The neighborhood store's customers may have to travel farther to shop after the store closes.
- If the store stays in business, the owner may raise prices to pay for extra security equipment or guards.

Take Action

- If you see anybody in a store take something without paying, report it to a salesperson, security guards, or a cashier. The person is really stealing from you.
- For a class project, interview the security managers of department stores or malls to find out how much shoplifting costs them. Ask about what they do to prevent it.
- Copy and pass out this brochure to teens at your local mall or downtown shopping district.