



HALL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

CRIME PREVENTION UNIT



CRIME PREVENTION TIP

October 13, 2009

SUBJECT: Cell Phone Security

Some things to consider regarding cell phone security:

Just about all of us have one, and it seems like life without one would be unmanageable at times. As diligent as we try to be, it's likely that we will eventually either lose our phone or, even worse, it might be stolen. While this in itself is an obvious problem, most cell phones have optional insurance to cover that type of loss, so it's more of an inconvenience than anything else. But let's think about what's contained in that cell phone for a minute.

Most of us list any number of people in the contact list by something other than their name, i.e., "Honey," "Hubby," "Mom," etc. That can pose a problem, as demonstrated by the following:

Someone has their car broken into and their purse, wallet, etc. is stolen, along with their cell phone. Inside the purse or wallet is a debit card. The perpetrator looks in the contact list and finds, "HUBBY." They quickly send a text message to "Hubby" and say, "I forgot my PIN." Hubby in turn sends it back in a text. Ta-da! There goes a tidy withdrawal from an ATM. Now, realistically most people probably wouldn't respond with a text, they would call their spouse and wonder why, after months or even years of using the same PIN, they've suddenly forgot it (not that it's impossible- we all have those days). Additionally, the daily withdrawal limit on most ATM transactions is relatively small, so there's not a huge chance of an account being emptied out completely.

But what about this scenario: A criminal predator obtains a mother's cell phone by whatever means you want to imagine. The predator knows the young daughter's name, because on the back of the family minivan is one of the common soccer ball magnets with their daughter's name and jersey number on it. He quickly finds the child in the contact list and sends her a text instructing her to "Meet me at _____." As far as the child knows, the text came from "MOM," so she does as instructed. Let your imagination be your guide from there.

What about labeling your home phone as, "HOME"? Now if someone breaks into your car, steals your phone, and gets your address from any number of documents in your car, they can call the house to make sure no one is home so they can rush over there and break in.

These scenarios may be a little far-fetched, but rest assured that if I can sit at my desk and come up with a dozen variations, somewhere out there a criminal has done all of this and more. The fact remains that by indicating a personal relationship to someone in your cell phone contact list, or labeling your home number "HOME," you've just given a criminal another piece of the puzzle.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- 1) Use regular names for everyone in your contact list.
- 2) Use a code name for your home phone.
- 3) If you utilize "I.C.E." (In Case of Emergency), insist that it be done by voice, not text.
- 4) Most importantly, safeguard your cell phone just like you would your checkbook, and never leave it in your unattended vehicle.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact

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