

# What is situational crime prevention?

Focusing on specific settings to prevent crime

First published 19 January 2022

Situational crime prevention focuses on the settings where crime occurs, rather than on those committing specific criminal acts. The emphasis is on managerial and environmental change that reduces opportunities for crimes to occur (Clarke, 1997). Situational crime prevention is based on two related theories.

- Rational choice theory (Cornish and Clarke, 1986), which states that potential offenders rationally choose to commit crime, and also the methods used in order to do so. This choice is influenced by the offender's need to maximise reward while minimising risk.
- Routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979), which states that, in order for a crime to occur, there must be the presence of three linked elements: motivated offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians. Capable guardians can include people such as security guards or the police, as well as environmental factors, such as locks or other security devices.

Situational crime prevention aims to increase risk and/or minimise reward, thus making either the commission of a criminal act too difficult, or the reward for committing the act too low to risk being caught.

Increased risk can be achieved by minimising the number of suitable targets or adding 'capable guardians'.

Cornish and Clarke (2003) produced 25 techniques of situational crime prevention, which detailed various types of interventions to reduce crime. The 25 techniques were split into five specific groups:

- increasing the effort
- increasing the risk
- reducing the rewards
- reducing provocations
- removing excuses

Interventions relating to neighbourhood crime described in this report tend to fall into the ‘increasing the effort’ and ‘increasing the risk’ categories (for further information, [see the 25 techniques of situational crime prevention](#)).

A similar concept to situational crime prevention is crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). CPTED and situational crime prevention are both concerned with changing the environment to reduce opportunities for crime. CPTED is associated with design solutions that often focus on architecture and planning, and is also known as ‘designing out crime’ (Cozens and Love, 2015). Situational crime prevention tends to be broader in nature, referring to any opportunity-reducing measure that has the potential to increase the difficulties or risks of offending (Clarke, 1989).

## Tags

Neighbourhood policing