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body damage. When the victim exits the vehicle to examine the situation, a second thief reaches into the car and grabs her purse, police said.

- Be careful when making withdrawals at banks. Thieves often watch customers, and they know the colors of withdrawal slips used by banks, so try to fill out the slips at home.

- Be alert when approached by a stranger asking for directions or the time of day. Thieves often use this approach when sizing up their victims, police said.

Shopping With Kids: Yes, there are times when you must drag the kids along on holiday shopping trips. But remember, youngsters don't have as much patience as adults for holiday shopping, or tolerance for crowds.

Police offer the following tips for safe holiday shopping with kids:

- Never let youngsters wander on their own through crowded stores. Do not leave children alone or out of sight—not even for one second.

- Cops said it is not wise to leave children alone in toy sections while you are shopping elsewhere in the store. Never, ever let children out of your sight, they said.

- Teach children never to speak to strangers, people who may offer gifts, money or candy. Children should be taught that they are the guardians of their own bodies. No one should touch them, or take them away, police said.

- Teach children to scream for help. You know they have lungs. Tell them to scream, kick, yell and fight with their fists and feet if a stranger tries to take them away. Noise is a natural deterrent to criminals, police said. Teach children to make noise if someone threatens to take them away.

- Teach children to know police officers, firefighters, and other safety officers. Let youngsters communicate, on their own, with police. Let them know that they can go to police and firefighters for help.

- On a special note, make sure you teach your children their name, address, phone number and your cell phone number, police said. Youngsters should be taught to dial 911 on their home phones and on pay phones. Make sure they know the name of your workplace or employer. This may sound simple, but it may also save your child in case of abduction, or if they stray away from you during hectic holiday shopping trips

Cops stress that it isn't hard to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of holiday shopping. Just remember, police said, lurking behind those twinkling lights and brightly colored holiday displays lies a seasonal scourge: pickpockets, thieves, con artists and scam masters, just waiting to hustle you out of your holiday.

It's never wrong to be careful. And you can't be too careful when shopping or taking in the sights around the holidays.

Follow NYFD Tips For Holiday Safety

BY LIZ GOFF

New York City Fire Department officials last week released the Fire Department's annual Holiday Guide listing safety precautions for the use and decoration of Christmas trees, wreaths, and other holiday ornaments. The guide lists the following suggestions for a fire-free holiday season:

- Keep matches and candles away from children, and make sure to extinguish all open flames before leaving a room.

- When opening gifts, place wrapping paper in a suitable container and dispose of properly.
- Check decorative lights for frayed wires before using them.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs or overload outlets or plugs.
- Use only "UL" (Underwriters Laboratory) or "FM" (Factory Mutual) approved decorative lights.
- Buy only fresh natural trees—and make a new cut one inch from the base to allow water absorption.

- Keep the tree away from heat sources (radiators, stoves, heaters, fireplaces and any open flames).
- Turn off tree lights when leaving home or before going to sleep.

Officials also offer these tips:

- Use wire or nylon cord to secure tree to the wall or ceiling to keep children or pets from tipping it over.

- Keep the tree away from halls, stairs and exits.
- Check and replace worn or damaged light sets or wires.
- If the tree dries out, take it down and remove it from the building.
- To avoid a chimney fire, never burn wrappings in a fireplace or wood stove.
- Never use candles on any type of Christmas tree!
- Trees need water. Check and refill the tree container often.
- Don't light up or smoke near Christmas trees.
- Keep the tree outdoors until you are ready to decorate it.
- Keep natural trees only two weeks, and dispose of them properly (check Department of Sanitation rules).

- Do not use electric lights on metallic trees—they heat up to dangerous levels. Use only reflective lights that sit on the floor for metallic trees, and make sure to shut the lights off when you leave the house or go to bed.

"Follow these guidelines for a safe, happy holiday season," Fire Department Commissioner Nicholas Scopetta said.

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