Which Locks Need Replacing After a Break-In?

A break-in leaves more than just emotional shock. Once the police have been called and the initial chaos settles, the question of security becomes urgent. The locks on your doors may still work, but can you trust them? The answer is rarely straightforward, and knowing which ones to change requires a careful look at how the entry happened and what damage was done to the hardware and the door itself.

In most cases, any lock that was forced, tampered with, or accessible to the intruder should be replaced. But the decision also depends on the type of lock, the condition of the surrounding door frame, and whether keys were stolen. A thorough approach means checking every exterior lock and the components that hold them in place. Rushing to replace only the most obvious lock can leave other weak points open.

Start with the point of entry

The first step is identifying exactly how the intruder got in. If they used force on the front door, that lock and its strike plate need immediate attention. But forced entry can also happen through a back door, a sliding patio door, or even a ground-floor window with a lock. Any entry point that shows signs of damage, such as a bent deadbolt, a cracked cylinder, or a broken strike, needs new hardware.

Even if the lock itself appears intact, the force used to open the door may have damaged the internal mechanism. A lock that still turns but feels gritty or stiff has likely been compromised. Replacing it now avoids a future failure when you need it most. When you are replacing locks damaged by burglary, it is wise to check the entire perimeter rather than just the door where the break-in occurred.



Lock Change North York

Rekey or replace your locks

At your door in North York. Open daily, 7am to 10:30pm.

Assess the door frame and strike plate

A lock is only as strong as the frame it secures. Forced entry often splits the wood around the strike plate or bends the metal itself. If the frame is cracked or the screws that hold the strike plate have pulled loose, a new lock alone will not restore security. The frame may need reinforcement or replacement before installing new hardware.

Look for splintered wood around the latch area, gaps between the door and the frame, or a strike plate that no longer sits flush. These issues weaken the hold of any deadbolt or latch. A locksmith can often reinforce the frame with longer screws or a wrap-around plate. In severe cases, the frame section may need to be rebuilt. Do not skip this step, because a new lock on a damaged frame is little better than the old one.

Check every exterior door, not just the forced one

Intruders sometimes enter through one door but also tamper with others to create a quick escape route or to return later. Any exterior door that shows fresh tool marks, a loose handle, or a misaligned latch should be treated as compromised. Even if a door appears untouched, if the keys were inside the home and are now missing, every lock that those keys operated must be rekeyed or replaced.

Stolen keys are a common oversight after a break-in. If the intruder took a set of keys from a purse or a hook by the door, they now have direct access to your home. In that situation, changing the locks on all exterior doors is the only safe move. Rekeying is often faster and

cheaper than full replacement, but it still requires new pins and springs inside the cylinder. If the cylinder itself is worn or old, replacement may be the better long-term choice.

Consider upgrading while you replace

A break-in is a harsh reminder that existing locks may not have been strong enough. Once you are already paying for new hardware, it makes sense to consider a higher security grade. Residential locks are graded by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) from grade 3 (basic consumer) to grade 1 (high security). Grade 2 is a solid middle ground for most homes.

Deadbolts with a hardened steel insert and a reinforced strike plate offer better resistance to physical force. If your old lock was a spring latch only, upgrading to a deadbolt or a combination lock adds real protection. Smart locks with keypad or biometric entry can also remove the risk of stolen keys, though they introduce their own electronic vulnerabilities. Weigh the convenience against the need for a purely mechanical backup.



Don't forget the garage and side doors

Garage entry doors and side gates are frequently overlooked after a break-in. If the intruder entered through the garage or had access to the garage door opener, the lock on the service door between the garage and the house should be replaced. That door is often less robust than the front door, making it an attractive target. A deadbolt on that door adds a critical layer of security.

Side doors leading to a backyard or alley are also common points of re-entry. If the intruder had time to tamper with them while inside the property, those locks are no longer reliable. Treat any exterior door lock that was within reach of the intruder as compromised, whether or not it shows visible damage.

When to call a locksmith

Some homeowners can replace a basic cylindrical lock or a deadbolt themselves with basic tools. But if the door frame needs repair, if you want to rekey multiple locks to a single key, or if you are unsure which parts to order, a professional locksmith saves time and prevents mistakes. A locksmith can also perform a security inspection of all entry points and recommend upgrades specific to your door type and frame condition.

For tenants and landlords, the situation involves additional considerations. A tenant should notify the landlord immediately after a break-in and request a lock change. In many jurisdictions, the landlord is required to restore the security of the rental unit. A tenant may also want to ask about rekeying rather than replacing if the locks are relatively new. For landlords, keeping a record of all lock changes and key holders helps manage future security.

Business owners face similar but higher-stakes decisions. A forced entry at a commercial property often means replacing not just the door lock but also any access control system components that were tampered with. Commercial locks are typically more robust, but they are also more expensive. A locksmith can help balance security needs with budget constraints.



When replacing locks damaged by burglary, the goal is not just to restore the previous level of security but to improve it where possible. Take the opportunity to upgrade to better hardware, reinforce the door frame, and eliminate the risk of stolen keys. A break-in is a violation, but it can also be a catalyst for making your home or business genuinely harder to enter without permission.

Once the new locks are installed, test each one from both inside and outside. Make sure the deadbolt throws fully into the strike plate, that the key turns smoothly, and that the door closes without sticking. If anything feels off, address it immediately. A lock that works properly gives peace of mind, and that is worth the effort of doing the job right the first time.