Being Locked Out: A Practical Checklist for Homes and Businesses

What to Do When You Cannot Get In

Being locked out of your home or business is one of those moments that stops you cold. The door clicks shut, you reach for your keys, and they are not there. For a moment your mind races. Then you realise you need a plan. Whether you are standing outside your own house in the evening or trying to open your shop before customers arrive, a clear checklist helps you stay calm and get back inside without causing extra damage or cost.

This article runs through the points you should check when you find yourself locked out. It covers the immediate steps, the decisions you have to make, and the things that help a locksmith work quickly once they arrive. The focus is on practical details that apply to both domestic and commercial properties, so you know what to expect and what to prepare.

First Things First: Stop and Assess

The moment you realise you are locked out, resist the urge to force the door or try to break a window. That instinct to get in fast often leads to damage that costs more to repair than calling a professional in the first place. Stand back and look at the situation. Are you sure the key is not in another pocket, in the car, or with someone else in the household? If you are at a business property, check whether a colleague or a manager has a spare key on them or at their home.

If you are certain the key is inside or lost, accept that you will need help. That is not failure; it is the smart move. The time you spend trying to improvise can make the job harder for the person who eventually opens the door.

Check Your Options Before Calling

Before you pick up the phone, run through a short mental list. Do you have another entrance that might be unlocked? A side gate, a garage door, a fire escape that you can open from outside? If you are at a commercial unit, is there a separate door for deliveries or staff that might have a different lock? Some homes have a hidden spare key under a stone or in a key safe. If you have a key safe, do you remember the code? It is worth a quick check before you dial.



If the property is a rented home or a leased business space, your landlord or letting agent may hold a spare key. That is often the cheapest and fastest solution. For a business, a partner or

director might have a set of keys at home. A quick phone call to them could save you the cost of a call-out.

Know Your Lock Type

If you do need to call a locksmith, it helps to know what kind of lock you are dealing with. Different locks require different tools and techniques. A simple night latch on a uPVC door is much easier to open than a high-security mortice lock on a timber door. If you can describe the lock to the person on the phone, they can bring the right equipment and give you a realistic idea of the time it will take.

Common types include the euro cylinder found on many modern uPVC doors, the five-lever mortice lock often fitted to older wooden doors, and the rim cylinder lock used on some commercial gates and shutters. If you are not sure what you have, look at the shape of the keyhole or the brand name on the faceplate. A locksmith will know what to ask you.

Prepare Proof of Address and Identity

When you call a locksmith, they will need to confirm that you have the right to access the property. This is not bureaucracy; it is a safeguard against someone calling a locksmith to break into a place that does not belong to them. Have your proof of address ready. A recent utility bill, a council tax statement, or your tenancy agreement usually works. For a business, a letterhead with the company address or a recent invoice showing the trading name can serve as proof.

The locksmith may also ask for an identity check before they start work. A driving licence, a passport, or a national identity card is standard. Having these documents to hand when you call speeds everything up. If you are locked out of a business outside normal hours, you might not have the paperwork with you. In that case, a phone call to a colleague who can vouch for you, or a quick email from a company account, can often satisfy the check.

Decide Between Non-Destructive and Destructive Entry

When you speak to the locksmith, ask about the two main approaches: opening the lock without damage, or drilling it out. The first option, which uses lock picking or specialist tools to manipulate the locking mechanism, is usually cheaper and leaves the lock intact. The second option, drilling, destroys the lock cylinder so the door can be opened. This is faster when the lock is jammed, broken, or of a type that cannot be picked, but it means you will need a replacement lock afterwards.

If the lock is a high-security model with drill protection, the locksmith may need to use a different technique. Drill protection refers to hardened pins or plates inside the cylinder that

stop a standard drill bit from going through. A good locksmith will know how to work around these features without damaging the door itself. The choice between the two methods depends on the lock type, the time available, and your budget. Ask for an explanation before they start, so you understand what is happening and what it will cost.

Think About Access Damage

Sometimes the lock is not the only thing that gets damaged. If the door latch is stuck or the door has swollen in the frame, the locksmith may need to apply force that leaves marks on the door or frame. This is called access damage. It is rarely the first choice, but it happens. If you are at a commercial property with expensive shopfront doors or a listed building, you might prefer a slower, more careful approach even if it costs a little more.





Let the locksmith know if the door is valuable or if there are any special considerations. A professional will adjust their method to minimise harm. After the job is done, you should have a clear understanding of any damage that occurred and what it will take to put it right.

Have Your Contact Details Ready

When you call a locksmith, they will need your address, a contact phone number, and a brief description of the job. If you are calling for a business, make sure you have the company name and the exact location of the door that is locked. Is it the main entrance, a back door, a roller shutter? The more precise you are, the faster they can get to you.

If you are in a shared building, such as a block of flats or a business park, give clear instructions on how to find your unit. Gate codes, floor numbers, and parking restrictions matter when every minute counts. A good locksmith will ask for these details, but having them ready shows you are organised.

What to Do While You Wait

Once you have called a locksmith and they are on their way, use the waiting time productively. If you are at home, check that any pets or children are safe. If you are at a business, make sure the premises are secure from the outside. Do not leave the door unattended if it is partially open or if the lock is damaged. Stay near the entrance so you can meet the locksmith and show them the problem.

If the weather is bad, find shelter nearby. Standing in the rain or cold will not help anyone. A neighbour's porch, a car, or a nearby cafe can keep you dry. If you are at a commercial property and there is a security guard or a concierge, let them know you are waiting for a locksmith so they are not alarmed by someone working on the door.

After You Are Inside

Once the door is open, take a moment to check that the lock still works properly. If the locksmith used non-destructive entry, the lock should function as before. If they had to drill it,

you will need a replacement. Ask for a temporary fix if you cannot get a new lock fitted immediately. A locksmith can often provide a basic replacement cylinder or a padlock that will hold the door secure until a permanent solution is installed.

If the lock was the original one from when the property was built, this is a good time to consider upgrading to a more secure model. Euro cylinder locks, for example, are common but can be vulnerable to a technique called snapping. Anti-snap cylinders are available and are a simple upgrade that improves security without changing the door.

For businesses, this is also the moment to think about key control. If the key was lost rather than left inside, you may want to change the lock to prevent unauthorised access. A locksmith can rekey the lock so the old key no longer works, or fit a new cylinder that comes with fresh keys. It is a small investment compared to the risk of someone using a lost key to enter your premises later.



Keeping a Record for Next Time

After the emergency is over, store a spare key with a trusted neighbour, a friend, or in a secure key safe. For a business, keep a set of keys off-site with a manager or in a locked cabinet that can be accessed by someone who is not always on the premises. Having a backup plan saves time and stress if it happens again.

Write down the locksmith's contact details and the make and model of your lock. If you ever need to call again, that information will make the process smoother. The website arrivalocksmiths.co.uk can be a useful place to start if you are looking for a local professional who covers emergency call-outs in the Cannock area and within a 25-mile radius. Keeping that number saved in your phone or written down somewhere visible is a simple step that can save you a lot of hassle later.

Being locked out is never fun, but it is rarely a disaster if you handle it methodically. Know your lock, have your proof of address ready, and choose a locksmith who can explain their approach clearly. That way, you are back inside with minimal fuss and no lasting damage. For anyone in the region who needs a reliable service, arrivalocksmiths.co.uk offers a good starting point for finding help when you need it most.