What to Do When a Window Pane Cracks Unexpectedly

Assess the Damage Safely

A cracked window pane can be unsettling, especially if it happens without warning. The first thing to do is keep everyone away from the area. Glass shards can fall or be knocked loose, and a crack can spread under pressure from wind or temperature changes. If the crack is in a double-glazed unit, the inner pane might still be intact, but the insulating glass unit has lost its seal. That means the insulating gap is gone, and the window will no longer perform as it should.

Check whether the crack is in one pane only or runs through both layers. In a double-glazed window, a crack in the outer pane often leaves the inner pane untouched, but the unit is compromised. Moisture can now enter between the panes, leading to fogging or condensation. The window will also let more heat escape. If both panes are cracked, the situation is more urgent because the window is structurally weaker and more likely to fail completely.

Stop the Crack from Spreading

Until you can get a permanent repair, you need to prevent the crack from growing. Temperature changes, wind, and even vibrations from closing the door or window can make a small crack race across the pane. A simple step is to apply a piece of clear packing tape or strong adhesive tape across the crack on the inside. This holds the edges together and reduces stress on the glass. Do not use masking tape or sticky tape that leaves residue; it will be harder to clean off later.

If the crack is near the edge of the pane, it may be more prone to spreading because the frame puts pressure on the glass. In that case, avoid opening or closing the window until it is fixed. Also, tape the crack on the outside if you can reach it safely. For an upper-floor window, do not lean out; call a professional to apply external tape.



Consider Temporary Boarding

If the crack is large or the pane is shattered, temporary boarding is your best option. This keeps out rain, wind, and intruders and gives you time to arrange a proper replacement. Temporary boarding can be done with a sheet of plywood or a piece of thick plastic cut to fit the frame. Measure the opening carefully and cut the board slightly smaller so it fits without forcing. Secure it with screws or heavy-duty clips into the window frame. Avoid using nails, as they can damage the frame or be pulled out by wind.

For a ground-floor window, temporary boarding also provides security. Make sure the board is fixed firmly enough that it cannot be pushed in from outside. If the window is upstairs, the boarding must be attached from inside to avoid working at height. If you cannot board it safely, call someone who can.

Understand the Type of Glass Involved

The repair approach depends on what kind of glass your window uses. Most modern windows have toughened glass for safety. Toughened glass is heat-treated so that when it breaks, it crumbles into small, blunt pieces rather than sharp shards. If your cracked pane is toughened glass, it may crumble in one go or stay held together by the interlayer, but it is unlikely to stay in one piece for long. Toughened glass cannot be repaired; it must be replaced.

Laminated glass, common in double-glazed units, has a plastic layer between two sheets of glass. A crack may affect only one layer, but the window is still compromised. Laminated glass can sometimes be repaired with resin if the crack is small and does not go through the plastic layer. However, a crack that penetrates the plastic layer or runs edge to edge usually requires a full unit replacement.

Annealed glass, or standard float glass, is weaker and breaks into large, sharp pieces. It is less common in modern windows but still found in older properties. A crack in annealed glass will spread quickly, and the only safe fix is replacement.

Check the Window Hardware

A cracked pane can sometimes be linked to problems with the window hardware. If the window hinge or window handle is loose or misaligned, it can put uneven pressure on the glass when the window is opened or closed. Over time, that pressure can cause a crack, especially in a double-glazed unit where the glass is already under some tension from the frame. Check whether the window opens and closes smoothly. If it sticks or requires force, the hinge or handle may need adjustment. A professional can realign the hardware and prevent future cracks.



Also inspect the perimeter seal around the window. The perimeter seal keeps the insulating gas inside the unit and stops moisture from entering. If the seal is cracked or missing, the unit

can fog up and lose its thermal efficiency. A failed seal often precedes a crack, especially in older windows. Replacing the seal is part of the glazing repair and should be done at the same time as the pane replacement.

Arrange a Permanent Repair

For most cracked windows, the only lasting solution is to replace the pane or the entire insulating glass unit. A repair kit from a hardware store might fill a small crack in a single pane of laminated glass, but it will not restore the window's original strength or thermal performance. For double-glazing, the unit must be replaced as a whole. You cannot replace just one pane of a sealed double-glazed unit; the whole unit comes out and a new one goes in.

Measuring for a replacement is critical. You need the exact width and height of the glass, not the frame. Also note the thickness of the unit and, for double-glazing, the spacer bar width. A professional glazier will take these measurements and order the correct unit. If you measure yourself, measure at three points across the width and three down the height, and use the smallest measurement. A unit that is too large will not fit, and one that is too small will rattle or leak air.

Choose a Qualified Specialist

Emergency glazing is a service that many locksmith companies offer alongside their core work. When a window cracks at an inconvenient hour, you want someone who can respond quickly and handle the replacement correctly. Arriva Locksmiths provides 24 hour emergency, domestic, commercial, automotive locksmith and glazing services in Cannock and within 25 miles. That means if your window cracks in the middle of the night or at a weekend, you can get help fast. A glazing specialist will bring the right type of glass, remove the old unit safely, and fit the new one with proper seals and hardware adjustments.

When you call a glazing service, ask about the type of glass they use. For a double-glazed unit, they should supply an insulating glass unit with the same thickness and spacer. For toughened glass, they should confirm that the replacement is also toughened. A good service will also check the window hinges and handles during the installation to make sure everything is aligned.

Prevent Future Cracks

Once the window is replaced, take steps to avoid another unexpected crack. Keep the window tracks clean so the window slides and closes without force. Lubricate the hinges and handles once a year with a silicone-based lubricant. Check the perimeter seal for cracks or gaps, especially after a cold winter or a hot summer. If the window is in a location that gets direct

sun, consider adding blinds or film to reduce thermal stress. Temperature extremes can make glass expand and contract, and if the frame does not allow movement, a crack can appear.



Also check for any impact damage from nearby trees, loose branches, or children's balls. Even a small chip can grow into a crack if the window is stressed later. If you spot a chip, tape it immediately and arrange a repair before it spreads.

Know When to Call a Professional

Some homeowners try to fix a crack with superglue or nail polish, but these methods rarely work and can make the repair harder later. A crack that is longer than a few inches, runs to the edge, or affects both panes of a double-glazed unit is beyond a DIY fix. Emergency glazing is

not something to delay. A cracked window is a security risk, an energy leak, and a safety hazard. For urgent situations, Arriva Locksmiths can send a technician to board up the window temporarily and schedule the replacement for the next day. Having a reliable emergency glazing service on call gives you peace of mind that help is available when you need it most.