



Neighbourhood WATCH

Toolkit

Module 10: Personal safety

This module looks at personal safety, in the home and outside. It should encourage you and your members to act positively, and should assist your community in improving personal safety and the quality of life.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- identify areas of risk to personal safety; and
- practise methods of increasing your personal safety.

Introduction

These notes should help you and your group to understand some aspects of personal safety. All the suggestions can be applied in everyday life. They may at first seem particularly relevant to women and the more vulnerable members of our communities, but they apply to everyone. Let's start by looking at some facts:

Fact 1 The chance that you or a member of your family will be a victim of violent crime is very low.

Fact 2 Violent crimes are comparatively rare and account for a very small part of recorded crime.

Fact 3 Young men are more likely to be victims of violent crime than women or the elderly.



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Remember

Personal safety is not new or mysterious, it is mostly **common sense**.

The best way to minimise the risk is by taking sensible precautions. Many of us do this already.

The following sections look at some aspects of personal safety and how you can reduce some of the risks.

Personal safety in the home

Make sure that your house or flat is secure. **Module 11: Security of buildings and property** has some useful advice on how to make your home secure.

Sensible precautions

Here are some common-sense precautions you should take at all times:

- Don't invite strangers into your home.
 - If you are selling your house, don't show people around on your own. Ask the estate agent to send a representative whenever anyone wishes to view.
 - If you are selling unwanted items, ask prospective buyers to come and view the object at a time when someone is with you.
- Don't leave keys on view, especially if they can be reached through a letterbox or window.
- If other people, such as previous tenants, could still have keys that fit, change the locks.
- Don't give keys to workmen or tradesmen, because copies can be made.





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- Don't leave valuables, such as wallets or handbags, just inside the front door, e.g. on the hall table. It is the easiest place to take them from.
- Draw your curtains after dark. This is especially important if you are alone.
- Install a second telephone in the bedroom or upstairs - it will allow you to make a call for assistance discreetly. If you have a cordless or mobile phone, you could take it with you into the bedroom at night.

What to do if there is an intruder

If you discover **signs of entry**, such as an open or smashed door or window, **do not enter your home**. Instead, go to a neighbour and call the police. If you **hear an intruder** when you are in your home you should always ring the police as soon as it is safe to do so.



Remember

Burglars do not want to risk a confrontation.

Callers at your door

The doorstep code

LOCK - Keep your front and back doors locked, even when you are at home.

STOP - Think before you answer the door; are you expecting anyone?

CHAIN - Make sure that the chain or bar is on the door before you open it.

CHECK - Ask for the caller's details and identity card.

If in doubt, keep them out.

It is important to take precautions when people call at your home. Not all burglars use force to enter premises, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to bogus officials or random callers. Most



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callers are genuine but some are not - they could be confidence tricksters or thieves.

Bogus callers usually have a cover story. Here are some common ones:

- I'm an antiques dealer ...
- I'm a roof repairer ...
- I can lay a new tarmac drive ...



- I need to use the telephone urgently ...
- I feel unwell ...
- I've kicked a ball into your garden, can I go and get it?
- I'm looking for my dog/cat, can I see if it's run into your garden?
- I've come to read the meter ...
- I'm from the council ...
- I'm looking for x, but I'm not sure which number he or she lives at ...



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Remember

Genuine callers will normally make an appointment first and will carry identification with their photograph attached.

If you live in a block of flats with an entry phone, or in sheltered accommodation, do not let in anyone who presses the buzzer and says they are looking for someone else.

Whenever someone comes to your door, follow the simple steps below; this advice could stop you from letting a bogus caller into your home.

- 1 Keep the door(s) locked.
- 2 Look out of the window, or use the spy hole if you have one, to see if you can identify the caller. If there is more than one person, be suspicious - it is unusual for a company to send more than one person. Is the caller wearing a company uniform?
- 3 Go to the door. Make sure that the safety chain is on before you open it.
- 4 Does the caller know your name? This is sign that they haven't called at random.
- 5 Ask to see an identity card - all reputable companies insist that their representatives carry one.
- 6 Look at the card and check the following:
 - Does it look like an official company card?
 - Does it carry the company name?
 - Is there a photograph - does it match the caller at your door?

If you are unsure, close the door and find the company's telephone number in the telephone directory. Don't use a telephone number that the caller gives you - it could be a bogus number. Call the company and ask for verification. Ask them to tell you your account number, and write it down.

If the company confirms that the caller is their official representative, open the door, keeping the safety chain on, and



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ask the caller to tell you your account number. If the caller is unable to tell you, do not let them in.

- 7 When you are satisfied that the caller is who they say they are, open the door.
- 8 If you have any doubts at all, don't open the door. Keep the caller out and telephone the police on 999.

Many Neighbourhood Watch schemes operate a 'nominated neighbour' scheme, whereby vulnerable residents refer all callers to a chosen trusted neighbour.



Remember

Children or young people at home on their own or babysitting should **never** open the door to strangers, no matter who they say they are.

Phone safety

For your **entry in the telephone directory**, use only your surname and initials. Consider going ex-directory.

When you **answer the phone**, simply say 'Hello' and do not give your name or number.

If the caller claims to have a **wrong number**, ask what number they wanted, rather than giving out your own number. Never give information about yourself to a stranger or let them know that you are alone.

If you receive an **abusive or threatening phone call**, do not say anything (an emotional reaction is what the caller wants). Put the receiver or handset down on a table or other surface and walk away. Return a few minutes later and end the call.

If the calls persist, tell the police and your telephone company. Keep a record of the dates and times of the calls.

If you receive several **malicious or nuisance calls**, note down their date and time and report them to the police. Your landline telephone service provider can have a nuisance calls trace set up



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on your landline. Mobile service providers might be able to bar calls and texts from specific numbers.

Internet safety

The internet is becoming more and more popular for financial transactions - online banking and online purchases, for example.

Get Safe Online is the UK's national internet security awareness campaign for the general public and smaller businesses. It is a joint initiative between the Government, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and private sector sponsors from the technology, retail and finance industries. Visit the Get Safe Online website (www.getsafeonline.org) to ensure that you are up to date with the latest online security advice. The site provides clear, accessible and up-to-date advice on the easy ways in which you can protect yourself and your computer while using the internet.

It is a sad fact that some adults use the internet to exploit and harm children. Research shows that many children make far greater use of the internet than their parents are aware of, and that about 1 child in 12 meets someone they have met online.

Parents, carers, industry, law enforcement and government all have a part to play in the protection of children when they are online. There are some useful sources of help and information given **later in this module**.

Identity theft

Identity theft is a growing problem in this electronic age. You should never forget that your personal information is valuable; criminals can use your personal details to open bank accounts and obtain credit cards, loans, state benefits and documents such as passports and driving licences in your name. If your identity is stolen and used fraudulently, you may have difficulty getting loans, credit cards or a mortgage until the matter is sorted out.

To prevent identity theft you should ensure that you do the following:

- Keep your personal documents in a safe place, preferably in a lockable drawer or cabinet at home.



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- Destroy unwanted documents such as bills, receipts, credit or debit card slips, bank statements, even unwanted post in your name, instead of casually throwing it away. For additional protection, use a shredder.
- Always check financial statements from your bank and credit card company for any suspicious entries or transactions - this can be a sign that someone is using your identity. If any unfamiliar transactions are listed, contact the company concerned immediately.
- Never give personal details or bank account details to anyone who contacts you unexpectedly. Your bank will **never** contact you to ask you for your personal identification number (PIN) or for a whole security number or password.
- Don't use the same password for more than one bank account and never use your banking passwords on other websites. If you use a number of different passwords it is harder for criminals to access your accounts.
- Always report lost or stolen documents such as passports, driving licences, credit cards and chequebooks to the organisation that issued them.

If you think that you are a victim of identity theft, or that you are at risk of becoming one, it is important to act quickly to make sure that you are not liable for financial losses caused by criminals using your identity.

- Consider contacting CIFAS, the UK's Fraud Prevention Service (www.cifas.org.uk), to apply for protective registration. Once you have registered, CIFAS members will carry out extra checks whenever anyone, including you, applies for a financial service using your address (you will have to pay a charge for this service).
- Report identity fraud involving the use of plastic cards (such as credit and debit cards), online banking or cheques directly to the financial institution concerned. They will investigate and report any cases of criminal activity to the police.
- Report other incidents to the relevant organisation and, depending on their advice, to your local police station.



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Personal safety out and about

We all have to go out and about – to work, to school, to shop, to socialise – and our everyday life should not be curtailed. By following some simple steps we can all move about in safety and with confidence.

Your bag or briefcase



- Put your wallet, purse or valuables out of sight. Use an internal, buttoned pocket. Consider using a moneybelt or bumbag.
- Make sure that your bag is properly closed, with the opening facing towards your body.
- Don't keep your keys in your bag or briefcase. That way, if your bag is snatched, you won't lose the keys as well.
- Don't keep papers carrying your personal details (e.g. bank statements) in your bag.



Remember

If your bag is snatched, don't confront the thief.
Your safety is more important than your property.

Your person

Avoid 'danger spots'. If possible, keep to well-lit streets and do not walk:



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- down dark, narrow alleyways; or
- across waste ground.

If you think you are being followed, keep moving and make for a busy area, like a pub, petrol station or shop.

If you go out to **exercise**, jogging or cycling, for example, vary your times and route. Stick to well-lit roads and pavements. On commons and parklands, keep to main paths and open spaces, where you can see and be seen. Avoid wooded areas.

A **personal alarm** can be very useful but it must be ready for immediate use. Also, make sure that it is designed to continue sounding if it is dropped or falls to the ground.

Self defence and safety awareness classes may help you to feel more secure.



Remember

When you go out, always make sure that you have details of public transport and enough money to get home.

Never hitch-hike or accept lifts from strangers.

Safety for young men

Young men are the group most likely to experience violent crime - usually from groups of other young men. They can reduce their risk by following the general guidance above, for example by keeping to well-lit or busy areas.

In addition, they should try to:

- avoid confrontational situations; and
- if a situation is becoming aggressive, quickly move away from it before matters get any worse.



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Remember

If a violent incident does occur, it is best to report it to the police.

What men can do to help women

A lot of women's fear of crime comes from men's actions. Men can help women who are on their own to feel safer by taking account of their fears. For example:

- If you are walking in the same direction as a woman on her own, don't walk directly behind her - cross the road and walk on the other side. This can reassure women that they are not being followed.
- Respect women's personal space - don't sit too close in a railway carriage or on a bus.
- Help female friends or relatives to feel safe - give them a lift, walk them home and see them safely indoors.



Personal safety on public transport

Fact Travelling by public transport is generally very safe.

Buses and trains

Public transport is safe if you take a few sensible precautions. For example:

- Before starting your journey, make sure that you know where you are going and which stop you need. Check departure times, especially for the last buses and trains of the day.
- Have your ticket or change handy. This ensures that your wallet or purse stays out of sight.
- Try to stay away from isolated bus stops, especially after dark.
- On an empty or late-night bus, sit near the driver. On a train, sit in a compartment where there are several people. If you feel uneasy, move to another seat or carriage.
- Don't be afraid to use an emergency alarm - check where it is upon boarding.

Taxis

- Always use a reputable company. Carry the number with you in case you need to contact them again. If you hail a taxi on the street, make sure that it is licensed - it should display a 'Taxi' roof sign and a 'Hackney carriage' licence plate.
- If possible, book by phone. Ask for the driver's name and the make/colour of the car. Confirm these when the car arrives to pick you up.
- If you can share a taxi with a friend, do so.
- Always sit behind the driver. If you chat, don't give away any personal details.



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- If you feel uneasy, ask to be let out in a well-lit area where there are plenty of people about.
- It's a good idea to note down the taxi's licence number. This can be found on the licence plate. The taxi and its driver can be traced with this number.



Remember

If in doubt, don't get in.

Personal safety when driving

Before you set out

- Make sure that your vehicle is in good condition – you don't want your car to break down, especially on a long trip.
- Plan your journey in advance. Make sure that you have money, fuel and a map.
- If you are meeting someone, tell them your expected arrival time and the route you plan to take.

While you are on the road

- Lock windows and doors while you are in the car.
- Keep any bags, valuables and your mobile phone out of sight.
- If you do have a window open, don't wind it down too far – someone could reach inside while you are stopped in traffic.
- If someone tries to flag you down, drive on until you come to a service station or somewhere busy, from where you can call the police. (However, someone could simply be drawing attention to a problem with your car, for example a flat tyre, so use your common sense.)
- If your car develops a problem, find a public phone or use your mobile to call for assistance. Don't accept lifts but wait for the police or breakdown service.

Some people carry a 'Help! Call the Police' sign to alert passing motorists. However, you may feel uneasy about drawing attention to



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your situation. You will need to assess the risks yourself - for example, are you alone? Is it dark?.

If you are on a motorway when the problem occurs:

- If possible, pull into a service station or leave the motorway at the next exit.
- If you have to stop on the motorway itself, try to stop near an emergency telephone. **NEVER cross the carriageway.**
- Pull onto the hard shoulder and stop as far to the left as possible; put on the hazard warning lights.
- Don't wait in the car - there is a high risk of a vehicle driving into your car. Get out of the car on the side away from the traffic and wait on the embankment.

Parking your car

Always park in a well-lit, busy place - especially if you are parking after dark. If you are parking in daylight and will return to your car much later, consider how things will look at night.

If you are parking in a **car park**, look for one displaying the Safer Parking Scheme, or 'Park Mark' sign. This is awarded to parking facilities where the parking operator has put in place measures that help to deter criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. You can find the nearest Park Mark car park by looking at the Safer Parking website (www.saferparking.com).

When you return to your car:

- have your keys ready, so that you can get into the car quickly;
- look around before you get in, to make sure that nobody is hanging around; and
- make sure that there is no one in the car.

If the worst happens

What would you do if someone attacked you? Could you fight back? Would you resist? Could you escape? Only you can decide in that situation, but preparing for all possibilities could give you a split-second advantage.



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Remember

The law doesn't allow you to carry anything that could be described as an offensive weapon, for example a knife, personal incapacitant spray, etc.

- If you are threatened, shout, scream and set off a personal attack alarm. This may unnerve the attacker and frighten them off.
- You have the right to defend yourself with reasonable force - your umbrella, keys, bag, hairspray or scent spray can all be used.

Conclusion



Remember

If you take precautions and are prepared for eventualities, you will be avoiding risks by applying some thought and basic common sense.

Sources of help and information

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre provides a single point of contact for the public, law enforcers and the communications industry to report targeting of children online, and will offer advice and information to parents and potential victims of abuse, 24 hours a day. More information is available at www.ceop.gov.uk.

Citizens Advice

The local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can help you to get legal advice. The number of your nearest CAB is on the Citizens Advice website at www.citizensadvice.org.uk and in the local telephone directory.



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Get Safe Online

This is the UK's national internet security awareness campaign for the general public and smaller businesses. It provides clear, accessible and up-to-date advice on the easy ways in which you can protect yourself and your PC while using the internet - particularly when shopping, banking or doing business over the internet.

Visit the www.getsafeonline.org regularly to ensure that you are up to date with the latest online security advice.

Internet Watch Foundation

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) tackles the distribution of child abuse images online. IWF operates the only authorised 'hotline' in the UK for the public to report their inadvertent exposure to illegal content on the internet. For more information, visit www.iwf.org.uk.

Malicious Calls Bureau

For advice on dealing with persistent malicious callers, telephone the Malicious Calls Bureau on 0800 661 441.

Rape Crisis centres

If you have been raped, a Rape Crisis centre will give you help and support. Information is available at www.rapecrisis.org.uk.

Social services

If you or your children need to get away from a violent partner, social workers at your local authority can put you in touch with a nearby refuge. A 24-hour emergency number will be in the telephone directory or on their website.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is the national charity for personal safety. It provides advice on minimising risk, which you can download from www.suzylamplugh.org or by contacting the Trust by post or telephone:

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust
National Centre for Personal Safety
Hampton House
20 Albert Embankment



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London SE1 7TJ

Tel: 020 7091 0014

Thinkuknow

The Thinkuknow website (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) provides information to children, parents and teachers about staying safe online.

Victim Support

If you have been attacked, Victim Support can help you cope. Ask the police to put you in touch.

Women's Aid

Women's Aid provides an advice service and sets up refuges for victims of domestic violence. Further information is available from www.womensaid.org.uk or the telephone helpline (0808 2000 247).



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Practical activity 10: Safety in your locality

The aim of this activity is to identify areas in the locality that reduce personal safety. By the end of the activity you will have produced suggestions for improving personal safety in your community.

Think of three features of your area that cause problems for personal safety. For example:

- problems with the site of a bus stop or the timing of a bus service
- badly lit areas that cause concern for people walking through them
- overgrown areas that provide cover for prospective thieves
- bogus or suspicious callers that have been seen in your area.

Write them below.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

In the space below each line, write an action that could be taken to minimise the risk to the community.

You could discuss your ideas at a Neighbourhood Watch meeting. This exercise could be extended by asking group members and their families to complete the form, so that you get the views of different types of people of different ages.

If you would like more information on the aspects of personal security you have considered, you can contact one of the



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organisations in the 'Sources of help and information' section of this module. They may be able to send a speaker along to one of your meetings.