



# Personal safety:

## Introduction

This module looks at personal safety, in the home and outside.

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

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

This module is in two parts:

- Part one contains the Development Notes which include separate fact sheets on different aspects of personal safety.
- Part two contains the Session Notes which let you run individual sessions based around each fact sheet.



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PERSONAL SAFETY

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## Notes



## Personal safety:

# Development Notes

These notes have been prepared to assist you and your group in understanding some aspects of personal safety. The suggestions in the unit can be understood and applied in daily life. They may seem at first particularly relevant to women and the more vulnerable members of our communities, but they apply to everyone.

Let's look at some facts first.

### **Fact one**

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

### **Fact two**

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

### **Fact three**

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

The best way to minimise the risk is by taking sensible precautions.

### **Remember**

**Many of us do this already, probably without realising it. Personal safety is not new or mysterious, it is mostly COMMON SENSE.**

The unit provides information for different situations. Hopefully this will encourage you and your members to act positively and assist your community in respect of personal safety and quality of life.



## How can you stay safe?

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

There are fact sheets on:

- Personal safety in the home
- Personal safety out and about
- Personal safety on public transport
- Personal safety when driving
- Personal safety - what men can do
- If the worst happens
- Sources of advice and information



## Personal safety in the home

### Make sure your house or flat is secure

The Development Notes on 'Buildings and property' have some useful advice on how to make your home secure.

### Key security

If other people, such as previous tenants, could still have keys that fit - change the locks. Don't give keys to workmen or tradesmen, copies can be made.

### Hearing the sound of an intruder

Only the individual can decide how to handle this situation. Here are some suggestions:

- keep quiet and avoid attracting attention;
- switch on the lights and make a lot of noise;
- if alone, call out loudly to an imaginary companion.

*Burglars do not want to risk a confrontation.*

### Discovering signs of a break-in

If you discover an open door or smashed door or window, do not enter, go to a neighbour and alert the police.

### Draw your curtains after dark

Especially if you are alone.

### Telephone extension upstairs or in the bedroom

This can provide reassurance and it allows calls for assistance to be made discreetly. But in any event, ring the police as soon as it is safe.



## Telephone directory entries

Use only surname and initials or consider going ex-directory.

## Answering the phone

Simply say 'hello' and do not give your name. If the caller claims to have a wrong number ask for it to be repeated. Never give information about yourself to a stranger or disclose you are alone.

## Abusive or threatening phone calls

Put the receiver down and walk away. Return a few minutes later and replace the receiver. Do not say anything (an emotional reaction is what the caller wants). If calls persist tell the police and your telephone company. Keep records of dates and times of calls.

British Telecom have a service for people who are subjected to nuisance calls. They can provide you with advice and help. Their number is in the 'Sources of help and information' section of this package.

## Selling your home

Don't show people around your home alone. Ask the estate agent to send a representative when anyone wishes to view. Also, when selling unwanted items, make any appointments for when someone is with you.



## Strangers at the door

Not all burglars use force to enter premises, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to the bogus official or random caller.

Most callers are probably genuine but some are not.

They could be confidence tricksters or thieves. It is important to take precautions when people call at your home. Bogus callers often pretend they:

- are antique dealers;
- are roof repairers;
- are tarmac drive layers;
- need to use the telephone urgently;
- have kicked a ball in your garden and need to retrieve it;
- feel unwell;
- are from the gas, water or electricity board;
- are from the local council;
- are looking for someone by name, but aren't sure where they live.

## Doorstep code

### ***BEWARE OF CALLERS!***

When someone comes to your door, follow these simple steps – this advice could stop you from letting a bogus caller into your home.

- Keep the door locked.
- Look out of the window or use the spy hole if you have one, to see if you can identify who the caller is. 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 uniform or is there a company car parked outside?
- Go to the door. Make sure the safety chain is on before you open it.
- Does the caller know your name?



- Ask for an identity card – all reputable companies insist their representatives carry one. Look at the card and check:
  - does the card look like an official company card?
  - is there a photograph – does it match with the caller at your front door?
  - does the card carry the company name?
- If you are unsure, close the door and go and look up the telephone number for the company in the telephone directory. Don't rely on a telephone number the caller may give you – it could be a bogus number. Call the company and ask for verification. Ask them to tell you your account number. Then, open the door, keeping the safety chain on and ask the caller to tell you your account number. If the caller is unable to tell you, **do not let them in.**
- If you have any doubts at all, don't open the door. Keep the caller out and telephone the **police** on 999.
- If you live in a controlled entry block of flats or sheltered accommodation, do not let in anyone who presses the buzzer and says they are looking for someone else.
- 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.

### **Remember**

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



## Personal safety out and about

We all have to go out and about whether to work, school, to shop, or to socialise. This part of our everyday life should not be curtailed, but by following some simple steps we can all move about in safety and with confidence.

### Carrying a bag or briefcase

- Check it is closed with the opening facing towards your body.
- Don't keep your keys in the bag/briefcase. If your bag is snatched, you won't lose the keys as well.
- Remember if your bag is snatched, don't confront the thief.

*Your safety is more important than property.*

### Put your wallet, purse or valuables out of sight

Use an inside buttoned pocket. Consider using a body belt or bum bag.

### Avoid danger spots

- Dark alleys
- Waste ground
- Alleyways
- Short cuts

Keep to well-lit streets if possible.

### Joggers and cyclists

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



### **If you think you are being followed**

Keep moving and make for a busy area, like a pub, petrol station, or shops.

### **Don't hitch-hike or accept lifts from strangers**

Always make sure you have details of public transport and enough money to get home.

## **Remember**

- A personal alarm can be very useful but it must be ready for immediate use. (Make sure it is designed to continue sounding if it is dropped or falls to the ground.)
- Self-defence and safety awareness classes may help people feel more secure.



## Personal safety on public transport

### Fact

Travelling by public transport is generally very safe, but take a few simple precautions.

### Buses and trains

- **Know where you are going and the stop you need.** Check departure times, especially last buses and trains.
- **Have your ticket or change handy.** This ensures 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 or conductor.**
- **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 on boarding.



## Taxis

Most taxi and minicab firms provide a safe and reliable service, but again some simple precautions are wise.

- **Use a reputable taxi and minicab company.** Carry the number to contact again.
- **Hail a licensed taxi** – one displaying a Taxi roof sign and Hackney carriage plate.
- **If possible book by phone.** Ask for driver's name and make/colour of car. Confirm these on arrival.
- **If you can share a taxi with a friend – do so.**
- **Always sit behind the driver.** If you chat, don't give away personal details.
- **If you feel uneasy, ask to be let out in a well-lit area where there are plenty of people about.**

When travelling in taxis it is always a good idea to take a note of the taxi's licence number. The taxi and its driver can always be traced with this number.

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**If in doubt, don't get in.**

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## Personal safety when driving

### Keep all windows and doors locked

- Whenever you are inside the car. Bags, carphone and valuables should be kept out of sight.
- If you have a window open, don't wind it down too far. Someone could reach in whilst you are stationary.

### Make sure your vehicle is in good condition

Especially for any long trip.

### Plan your journey

- Make sure you have money, fuel and a map.
- If you plan to meet anyone, tell them of your route and arrival time.

### If someone tries to flag you down

Drive on until you come to a service station or somewhere busy. You could 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.)

### After dark, park in a well-lit, busy place

- If using a car park look for one displaying the Secured Car Park signs
- Look round before you get in.
- When parking in daylight, consider how things will look if returning at night.





## Have your keys ready when you go back to the car

Make sure there is no one in the car.

## If your car develops a problem

- Find a telephone.
- If on a motorway, pull into a service station, or leave at the next exit. On motorways follow the marker arrows to the closest phone. **NEVER cross the carriageway.**
- If you stop on the carriageway, stop as far to the left as possible and put on hazard warning lights.
- On motorways, don't wait in the car if at all possible - there is a high risk of an accident. Wait on the embankment with the front passenger door open. If you feel threatened, lock yourself in the car and speak through a small gap in the window.
- Don't accept lifts but wait for the police or breakdown service.
- Some people carry 'HELP CALL THE POLICE' signs to alert passing motorists. However, you may feel uneasy about drawing attention to your situation. You will need to assess the risks yourself (for example, are you alone? is it dark?).

## Consider using a mobile phone

- A mobile phone could be extremely useful if you frequently have to travel after dark, or your job involves visiting people at home.
- Your employer may provide one.



## Personal safety – what men can do

Men can help by taking the issue of women's safety seriously.

Consider these points:

- If walking in the same direction as a woman on her own, don't walk behind her – cross the road and walk on the other side. This may reassure her she is not being followed.
- Don't sit too close to a woman on her own in a railway carriage or bus.
- Consider the consequences of your actions. Staring, whistling, passing comments etc, can be threatening to a woman.
- Help women friends or relatives. Give them a lift, walk them home and see them safely indoors.



## 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.

- If 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, hair or scent spray can all be used.

*The law doesn't allow the carrying of anything which can be described as an offensive weapon, for example a knife, CS spray etc.*



## Sources of help and information

### Victim support schemes

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

### Social Services

If you or your children need to get away from a violent man, social workers at your local council can put you in touch with a nearby refuge for women. Their 24-hour emergency number will be in the phone book.

### Rape Crisis Centres

If you have been raped, they will give you help and support. Find the nearest centre by phoning 0171 837 1600. In Scotland 0131 556 9437.

### Citizens Advice Bureaux

They can help you get legal advice. Get the number of your nearest CAB in the local phone book.

### The Suzy Lamplugh Trust

14 East Sheen Avenue, London SW14 8AS  
Tel: 0181 392 1839

A national charity for personal safety.

### Women's Aid Foundation

They provide an advice service, and set up refuges for victims of domestic violence. Their national helpline is 0117 963 3542.

### BT offer an advice service on how to deal with malicious callers

Tel: 0800 666 700, where a recorded message will advise you. If you need further advice, dial 150 (free) between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday.



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## Conclusion

These notes contain ideas which can assist with personal safety in different scenarios.

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

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**The next part of this module contains Session Notes on personal safety.**

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## Personal safety:

### Session Notes

#### About these notes

These Session Notes contain an outline for how you can use the Development Notes on personal safety to run short training sessions with the members of your scheme.

Because the needs of your Neighbourhood Watch scheme are unique, this session has been left as flexible as possible. The session outline is designed to let you base short training sessions around each of the individual fact sheets in the Development Notes.

#### How long the session should last

Between 30 and 45 minutes.

#### How many people should attend

Fourteen to 16 people is about the maximum size group for these sessions.

#### The resources you will need

A copy of the relevant fact sheet for each member of the group.



## Session preparation

Before you run any sessions on personal safety you should find out exactly what your scheme members need to know. You could include personal safety training as a discussion item on one of your meetings. This would help you find out:

- whether people want information on personal safety;
- what aspects they are most interested in.

With this information you will be able to plan ahead and include personal safety training on the agenda for one of your meetings. If necessary, you could spread the training out over a number of sessions.



## Session plan and time allocation

### **Introduction 5 minutes**

Introduce the topic by explaining that the chances of any individual being at risk are rare. But awareness of personal safety will help to make the risk even less.

Explain that during the session the group will have a chance to look at some suggestions for how to improve their personal safety.

### **Local features 5–15 minutes**

The group should discuss anything in your area that causes problems for the aspect of personal safety you have chosen. For example you could discuss:

- problems with the siting of bus stops or the timing of bus services;
- badly lit areas that cause concern when people are walking through them;
- bogus or suspicious callers that have been seen in your area;
- travelling by car.

In your discussion, include details about exactly what the problem is and what you think ought to be done about it.

**Personal safety 15–30 minutes**

Give the group a copy of the relevant fact sheet and allow them a few minutes to read through it.

Use the remainder of the time to discuss the ideas in the fact sheet that the group found most useful. Relate this discussion back to the local features and ask if these techniques will make your area safer.

**Further action and rounding off 30–35 minutes**

Ask the group if they want any more information on the aspect of personal security you have discussed. If so you can contact one of the organisations in the 'Information' section of the Development Notes. They may be able to send a speaker along to one of your meetings.

Finally, remind the group that the risk to them is very low.