

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

OUT & ABOUT

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Introduction

This section is designed to make you think about your safety when out and about and steps you can take to keep yourself safe.

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 the fear of crime. By following some simple steps we can all move about in safety and with confidence, by foot, bus, taxi, train and car.

It is rare to be confronted by a stranger. Those most at risk are men between 16 and 24 years old and you are more vulnerable if you have been drinking alcohol as your judgment may be impaired. Drinking responsibly will help keep you out of trouble.

There are also sensible precautions you can take to reduce the risk of being threatened or assaulted, including keeping your valuables out of sight and avoiding walking alone at night in quiet areas.

Out at night

You are far more vulnerable to suffer an accident when drinking, especially if there are lots of people around you doing the same. Excessive amounts of alcohol can make a normally minor injury from a fall or blow a lot worse.

There are more police patrolling town centres on Friday and Saturday nights to help with safety concerns. Many town centres also have Taxi Marshalling Schemes.

Know your limits. Stop drinking when you have had enough, when you know you are becoming less able to control your senses.

Don't be drawn into confrontations – just walk away

Look after your friends

On the move – Walking with confidence

Plan your route. At night try and keep to well lit busy roads and avoid taking short cuts or routes through parks, alley ways or car parks. Be aware of what is going on around you. Carry a torch for dark areas. Where ever possible walk with a friend. 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.

Consider a personal attack alarm; they are cheap and available from many DIY stores. Carry it in your hand, not your bag or pocket, so that if needed you can use it immediately.

If you have a mobile phone, keep it out of sight. Cover up any expensive looking jewelry and put your house keys in your pocket. If you are carrying a bag, keep it close to you with the opening facing inwards. But if someone does grab your bag, let it go – your safety is more important than your property.

Be aware of pickpockets, who are highly skilled at removing purses, wallets or mobiles from pockets and handbags. Consider purchasing and using a purse chain. It is preferable to place mobiles, wallets and purses in your front trousers pockets if possible. Be vigilant in crowded places such as markets and shops.

Walk on the side of the road that faces the oncoming traffic. If you near someone walking behind you, look to see who it is before they reach you. If you think someone is following you, cross the street – more than once if necessary – to check. If you are still worried, go to the nearest place, which is well lit and busy, for example a pub or petrol station and call the police.

If a vehicle pulls up next to you or the driver asks you something, keep a distance away from the vehicle. If you are threatened, get away from the vehicle as quickly as you can. If you can, try to remember details about the vehicle (number plate, make, colour) and contact the police.

Remember – you will find it harder to hear traffic or people approaching you, if you wear a stereo or ipod.

Never accept a lift from someone you don't know or don't feel comfortable with. Never hitch-hike.

If you take a regular route walking the dog, jogging or cycling, try to make variations and go at different times.

Men should be extra aware that when walking closely behind a woman, it may make her feel uneasy. You could cross the road to give reassurance that you are not following her.

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Using transport

Driving

Plan your route. Keep a map and a torch in the car and keep to main roads where possible, even if using a satnav. This will reduce the need to stop and ask directions. If you're going on a long journey, make sure your vehicle is in good condition and has enough petrol, oil and screen wash.

If someone tries to flag you down for help, don't stop immediately. Keep driving until you get to the next public place and help them by calling the police. This way, you don't put yourself at risk.

If you think you are being followed, don't go home. Go to a public place that you know will be open, such as a 24 hour supermarket.

If you break down, put your hazard warning lights on. When telephoning for help, let the police and breakdown recovery staff know that you are alone. Sit in the front passenger seat and lock the doors. On a motorway, it is safer to sit away from your car on the embankment, leaving the passenger door open

Using taxis

Always use a reputable mini-cab or private hire car firm and book at their office or by phone. Remember that only licensed 'Hackney Carriages' are allowed to pick people up in the street, without having made a booking first. Private hire firms must be pre booked.

Ensure that the taxi which arrives is the one that you ordered. If you gave your name at the time of booking, get the driver to repeat it before you get in. Look out for identification on the driver or vehicle.

When you get home, ask the driver not to drive off until you get inside your home.

If you are not sure about the driver, do NOT get in. If you feel uneasy once you are in the taxi, ask the driver to let you out at a busy, well lit place.

Enquire about town centre Taxi Marshalling Schemes, available in many major towns on Friday and Saturday nights.

Using busses and trains

On buses, avoid isolated stops and always use the lower deck of the bus. If the bus is empty, sit near the driver.

On the train or tube, sit in a carriage which is busy and one which will be near the exit of your destination.

If you are arriving when it is dark, try to arrange to be met by someone if possible. Use the main escalators and walkways where there is often CCTV, rather than short cuts and cut throughs.

Further advice and information

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
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20 Albert Embankment
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