

Personal Safety Guidance

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Scope

This guidance note is written to help anyone to live and behave in ways that will enhance personal safety.

Guidance Summary

Although statistically very few people are likely to become victims of crime or suffer injury, whether accidental or otherwise, personal safety is an issue which affects you. There are no hard and fast rules as everyone will approach and deal with a situation differently. Paying attention to your surroundings and maintaining a vigilant approach at all times are part of a positive approach, which you can adopt to help ensure your own safety.

The perception of crime and the people who are most vulnerable in society can differ dramatically in real life. It is possible that you are most likely to be focused on safety issues when visiting rougher areas or when working at night. You should, however, follow good health and safety practice at all times. This guidance note aims to provide you with sensible advice that is also relevant in your personal life, but please remember it is not a definitive guide and cannot cover all the situations you might encounter.

Risk assessments must always be undertaken where significant hazards associated with personal safety could be encountered at work.

Personal Safety

Everyone working in the NAS must be made aware of the following guidelines. Employees may unwittingly be taking risks during the working day, most of which could be avoided by minor changes to current practices and procedures. Employees must familiarise themselves with the guidelines below, so they become second nature.

Line Managers are responsible for implementing local policies to ensure all the guidelines are covered.

Guidelines - Questions to ask yourself

Out and about

- Does anyone know where you are?
- If your travel plans change, do you tell your manager/colleagues?
- Do you/your Manager check out people you meet alone?
- Do you carry a mobile phone, is it charged up, turned on and do people know your number?
- Have you made sure you can be contacted? (mobile phone, telephone number of places visited)
- Do you know exactly where you are going and how to get there?
- If you are returning home after dark, have you considered the possible risks, e.g. where you parked the car, availability of public transport?
- Are you likely to be carrying cash or valuable items?
- Are valuable, easily stolen items visible or accessible, e.g. lap top computer, mobile phone, tools, briefcase or handbag?
- Do you carry a personal alarm?

At your place of work

- Are you alone at work at all, especially at night or out of normal hours?
- Are there areas where you feel uneasy, e.g. poorly lit entrances or corridors, car parks, etc.?
- Is your office/work area a potential fire/safety trap, e.g. possible escape route blocked by a desk, filing cabinet, etc.?
- If your work involves contact with the general public, do you know what to do if someone becomes aggressive?
- Do you report aggressive behaviour from clients or colleagues?

Do not just sit back and assume it will never happen to you. Look at the way in which you go about your work, talk to your manager and colleagues if you have concerns about situations or current practices, and if necessary arrange for a risk assessment to be carried out.

Staying Safe in Public Places

Everyone will occasionally feel worried about becoming a victim of crime when they are in a public place. It is a fact that there will always be some risk no matter how small. Always be prepared. Remember that you may encounter unsociable behaviour or even aggression. Here are some practical steps that you can take to reduce risk without restricting your freedom too much.

Ensure a record of intended movements is left with somebody when at all possible.

Dress appropriately for the area that you plan to visit. Avoid wearing jewellery.

Think ahead and plan your journey. Avoid going to deserted areas and particularly late at night.

Consider whether you should be taking somebody else with you.

Walk confidently – hold your head up and look as if you know where you are going.

Whenever possible, keep to well lit and busy main roads when walking alone at night.

Walk down the middle of the pavement, facing on-coming traffic to avoid kerb crawlers.

Avoid short cuts like alleyways, waste ground and wooded, bushy areas.

Stay alert; be aware of what's going on around you.

Carry a personal attack alarm in your hand or pocket.

Keep a phone card or change handy for an emergency phone call.

If you think that you are being followed:

- Walk quickly across the road
- Cross it again if necessary
- Walk immediately to a busier area where you know there will be other people such as a shop, garage, a well-lit house, pub, cab office, police station or hospital.
- Call the police as soon as you get somewhere safe.

If carrying a laptop avoid using a laptop bag instead use a rucksack or a bag which makes the laptop less recognisable.

Do not risk personal injury if someone tries to steal your personal or office property. It is more important that you remain safe at all times.

It is an offence to carry any item for the sole purpose of self-defence. However, everyday items like umbrellas, keys and torches can be used to defend yourself as a last resort.

Staying Safe in your Car

A car can give you a greater sense of security. You will undoubtedly feel safer in your car than walking in the dark or waiting for public transport. Driving can however be risky, especially if your car lets you down miles from anywhere or if you drive in urban areas with unlocked doors. Here is some practical advice that can help you to stay safe in your car:

Plan your journey in advance.

Keep your car doors locked when driving and especially in urban areas.

Equip yourself with a mobile phone.

Keep any valuables – including handbags, mobile phones and laptops out of sight. They can easily be snatched when you stop at traffic lights, especially if windows are left open and doors unlocked.

Always keep a map to hand or use a satellite navigation system so you won't need to stop and ask directions.

If you think you are being followed, flash your lights and sound your horn to summon help. Drive towards a busy place.

Think before you stop to help either at an accident or for someone flagging you down – it may not be genuine. You may be able to help as much by reporting it by phone.

Keep your car regularly and properly maintained. Try to learn basic car maintenance. It may help you to prevent a breakdown.

Parking

By adopting a few simple safety measures you can reduce possible risks at a time when you could be vulnerable – while parking and getting out of your car. Remember that a parking place in daylight can seem a lot safer than if it is after dark.

Park in a well lit and, if possible, busy place.

Always reverse into a parking space. This will allow you to leave quickly should the need arise. For the same reason park facing out of a cul-de-sac.

Avoid parking too close to walls and high hedges behind which criminals can hide.

Lock all your car doors and close your windows and sunroof even when purchasing a parking ticket.

Remove GPS equipment and other valuable items.

Put into your boot any loose items and, if you are a woman, anything that might indicate this such as bags or clothing of any kind.

When returning to your car, have your keys ready in your hand so that you can drive away quickly. Before you get into your car, check for signs of tampering and check the back seat. If necessary, use a torch.

Do not leave bags on the roof or bonnet whilst you lock or unlock your car.

If you use a multi-storey car park, try to use a lower floor, near a staircase or ramp where there is likely to be a steady stream of people, and park in a well-lit position. Although leaving your car during daylight you may return when it is dark.

If there is an attendant, park close to the booth if possible.

Do not park illegally. Your vehicle may be clamped or removed by the police. Regaining the use of your vehicle is likely to be a lengthy and expensive procedure during which time you may be at greater risk.

Breakdowns

Everybody dreads the thought of their car breaking down and especially miles from anywhere. Help yourself to stay safe by following these steps:

Make sure that your car is always in good running order. Have it serviced regularly and carry out basic visual checks.

Consider joining one of the breakdown organisations.

If you have enough warning that a breakdown is imminent, or get a puncture, try to pull up in a well-lit public place.

If you have broken down, stay in your car as much as possible. Keep the windows closed and the doors locked. (*Different advice applies for motorway breakdowns. – see below*)

If someone approaches your car – even the other driver in an accident – you do not have to get out; wind down the window just far enough to speak to them.

Never hitch a lift – or pick up a hitchhiker.

When working in rural areas you need to be more prepared in case of a breakdown. Carry appropriate clothes and equipment (such as a torch) for poor weather conditions.

Police advice for people travelling in rural areas is to carry a pre-prepared card saying “HELP – CALL POLICE” and in the case of a breakdown to lock all doors and display.

Carry the number for licensed taxis or a minicab service you know well, in case you breakdown and are in a hurry. Never hail a minicab.

Ask the cab company for the name and call sign of the driver who will be collecting you. Always sit in the back and avoid giving away any personal information about yourself.

Motorway Breakdowns

Breaking down on a motorway can be quite a frightening experience. If this should happen to you, try to remember these helpful tips:

- Pull over to the hard shoulder, but only in an emergency. Pull over as far to the left as possible.
- Switch on your hazard warning lights - day or night.
- Try to stop at an emergency phone (they are a mile apart on a motorway – follow arrows on marker posts to nearest phone) to report your difficulty. This is better than a mobile.
- Exit from the passenger side, leaving door unlocked.
- Do not stay in the vehicle unless carrying people with autism and their risk assessment is such that they should stay in it.
- When using the phone remain as anonymous as possible by turning away from, but keeping an eye on, on-coming traffic.
- If you are a woman on your own, tell the Motorway Control. Your call will then be given priority by the police and by the motoring organisations.
- Get out of your vehicle and – for your own safety – stand behind and well clear of the crash barrier (if safe to do so). Although you may feel more secure in your car, 10% of all fatal motorway accidents involve vehicles parked on the hard shoulder.

- If someone approaches you, get back into your vehicle via the passenger door and lock the door. Open the window a quarter of an inch and – if you have to – speak to the person through the gap. Leave the vehicle again, by the passenger door, as soon as safe to do so.
- When the repair van arrives make sure the mechanic knows your name.

Reporting Incidents

Reporting to Your Manager

Report any accident or incident of violence or threatened violence, which occurs during working hours, to your manager. This should be done initially by telephone and followed up using the Accident/Incident report form. By reporting the incident you may help prevent another person from encountering a similar situation in that area.

Reporting to the Police

If you should become the victim of crime the following is the type of information that will be useful to the police. By remaining calm and actively noting as much information as possible, you can help to stop the same thing happening again.

Points to note include:

- How many people were involved?
- Have you seen the person(s) before?
- Age.
- Height and build.
- Shape of face. If male, clean shaven or bearded?
- Colour of eyes.
- Type of clothing. In particular, look out for brand names and motifs on trainers, jackets, belts, etc.
- Any distinguishing features – tattoos, scars or jewellery?
- Voice – any distinguishing accent?
- Was a vehicle used – can you describe it? Note down as much of the registration as you can remember as soon as you can.
- Which direction did they go?
- What time did the incident take place?
- Were there any witnesses?

Visiting Properties

The way in which you approach a property can cause an occupant to become upset before they open their door and can lead to confrontation. The following is a list of things people find particularly annoying and which you should avoid:

- Rapid or loud banging of the doorknocker
- Ringing the doorbell for an unnecessary length of time.
- Knocking or tapping on a window or glass door.
- Peering through a window or a glass door.
- Looking through a letterbox.
- Standing inside a porch.
- Standing too close to the threshold of the door.
- Shouting through a letterbox or outside a door.

- Putting a foot on the threshold once the door is open
- Not closing a gate behind you.
- Not wiping feet when entering a property.
- Wearing sunglasses.

When you have knocked or rung a doorbell it is advisable to take at least two steps back. Move slightly to one side but remain in view of the door at all times. By doing this you will give the occupant space when they open the door and they are less likely to feel that you are being intrusive. If an occupant is hostile, or has an over excited dog, it will also give you a head start should you need to move out of the way quickly.

If, when a resident opens the door, they begin to verbally abuse or threaten you, leave immediately. Do not turn your back on the individual. Always try to back off whilst still facing the person or keep them in your vision as this will help guard against a surprise attack behind.

Preventing Attacks by Dogs

The following information is intended to help you in understanding a dog's behaviour towards you when entering its territory.

All dogs tend to conform to predictable rules of behaviour; however, guard against being over confident – remember each dog is an individual and some breeds are less predictable than others.

Friendly dogs will bark at you as they are defending their territory. Talk to the dog in a firm but quiet voice. Stand still so that it can sniff you.

Many dogs will respond to you by wagging their tails. Others will ignore you but do not be too forward or over friendly.

As you approach a dog, observe how it reacts to you:

If it stays still or backs off, it probably regards you as a dominant intruder and will be too scared to attack.

If it walks or runs towards you with its tail wagging in a low position, it is probably friendly and unlikely to bite.

If the dog stiffens up, holds its tail high, snarls and stares at you, then be on your guard.

If it shows its teeth it may be safest to go no further but don't turn and run – back away slowly if possible. Remain still, positioning yourself against a wall if possible.

Never run past a strange dog or walk quickly away from it as this may release its chase response and you may get bitten as a result. Always walk slowly backwards, facing the dog if you feel it may chase you.

Try to avoid showing any fear – a dog can read fear in your eyes and body movements. Keep calm, whistle, walk slowly or speak firmly to it.

Never stare at a dog. Staring is a threat and a dog may read it as a challenge and attack.

Give very loud, sharp, shouted instructions to the dog to sit. This can be very effective in the case of German Shepherd dogs and other trained guard dogs.

Remember the golden rule – if in doubt back away slowly keeping the dog in your sight at all times.

Be more cautious if there is more than one dog.

If you are entering a property and you are concerned about a dog's behaviour, ask the owner if they would mind putting the animal in another room.

If dogs are wandering loose in a garden or farmyard, try to attract the attention of the owner before setting foot on the property. Even if a dog is not visible, pay attention to any signs, warning that one or more are on the premises.

Dogs rarely attack, so do not be over anxious about every dog you meet. Most are scared about getting into a fight but like to act tough on their own territory.

Do not ignore dogs but behave in a friendly and confident way at all times. You will then lessen their own fear.

Looking Through Letterboxes

There may be occasions when you are tempted to look through a letterbox to check to see if the occupant is at home. If you do so, you should be aware of the dangers you might be facing as well as how your actions may be perceived.

For instance:

- You may provoke the occupant to feel agitated or aggressive towards you.
- A dog jumping up at the letterbox may attack you if you put your fingers through.
- The door may open while you are looking through it, which might be embarrassing for you.
- You may receive an injury from an unsuspected substance or weapon such as a needle or knife being put through the opening.
- A syringe may be taped to the inside of the letterbox. This is often a problem in certain areas where drug dealing and abuse is prevalent. Syringes are often hidden in properties and are left as booby-traps for officials.

If you must look through a letterbox you should:

- Open it carefully using a pen or similar object. Never use your fingers.
- Never look directly through a letterbox.
- Always stay to one side of the letterbox and look diagonally across the room inside.
- Always stay as far back as possible using the door itself as a shield. If you need to see more of the room inside, simply move to the other side of the letterbox. This will help prevent anything from being stuck or sprayed into your eyes.

Entering a Property

If you are going into a property please remember the following:

- Do not enter the property if a person under 16 years of age invites you inside unless they are the owner/occupier in their own right. Always ask if there is an adult at home. If a responsible adult is not present you should leave and explain that you will call again.
- When invited inside try to keep the occupier in front of you if you have cause to be wary.
- Once inside the property, the occupier might wish to lock their door. This might be for genuine reasons as in the case of an elderly person who is scared of crime. In certain circumstances, however, you might feel threatened. Do not enter any further into the property if this is the case.
- It may also not be apparent until you have actually entered a property that you are dealing with someone who is under the influence of drink or drugs, or is mentally unstable. In these situations you must judge whether you have the experience and training to continue or need to bring matters to a quick conclusion. You must judge each situation as you see fit. If you feel threatened make an appropriate excuse and leave.
- If you need to make an excuse to leave, you should consider the effect this might have on the other person. Obviously in an extreme situation your priority must be to exit the building. **YOUR SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT.**

Household Dangers

When inside a property, make yourself familiar with your surroundings. The approach you need to take will obviously depend on the type of structure of the household being visited. Nevertheless, it is always good practice for you to use the span of your vision to look out for:

- How a door shuts and locks. Note if a resident locks the door. An older person might do this out of habit but in certain circumstances you might have cause for concern. (See dealing with aggression inside a property.)
- Obstacles preventing a quick exit or which might pose a danger to you. These might include rugs, loose carpets, pets, children's toys or furniture near to doorways. Tripping over such items can pose the biggest danger of all.
- Any sharp objects. Items such as knitting needles, knives, scissors, etc could be left on a chair where you are invited to sit. Protruding objects could also hurt you as you move past. Check your seat before sitting to avoid any accidents. An unbalanced or aggressive occupant could also use such items as an offensive weapon. Note their location.
- Be aware if other people are in the household.
- If an occupant offers to take your coat or jacket and this seems appropriate discreetly ensure that you remove any items of value first.
- Risk assessments must be carried out before assisting a householder with any domestic task and particularly any activity involving lifting or climbing.
- If given a choice and if appropriate, select a hard backed or firm chair, or sit on the edge of a soft one. Apart from being more comfortable this will allow you to stand quickly should the need arise.
- If you are worried, avoid sitting where your exit can be blocked. Sit as near as you can to the door you entered through and not where someone can approach you from behind.
- Keep a good distance between yourself and the occupier, particularly if their behaviour is giving you cause for concern. This will allow you more time to react to any unpredictable behaviour. If the person smokes and you find this objectionable, it will also help you avoid breathing in their smoke.

- At night allow time for your eyes to adjust to the dark when leaving a property. Beware of steps and uneven ground which your eyes might have difficulty recognising. Carrying a small torch in your pocket is a particularly effective way of overcoming this problem.

Dealing with Aggression

The main triggers for violence are likely to stem from aspects of behaviour or personality. The ones which you should be most aware of are:

- **Alcohol.** This often increases feelings of violence and aggression. If you encounter someone at an address who has been drinking to a significant degree, you should back off and call again if you consider this appropriate. Be careful how you withdraw from the situation as this might provoke the aggression you are trying to avoid.
- **Behaviours Associated with Autism.** Where possible you should find out all that you can about individuals who may present challenging behaviour. In a formal setting, e.g. a service or school, you must follow the established procedures and be familiar with care plans, risk assessments etc. Where there is a risk of aggression, for example, in the community where the established procedures have not yet been implemented, say, a first visit then extreme caution must be exercised.
- **Prejudice.** This is most likely to be encountered, at least initially, as verbal abuse. You should not try to counter prejudice when it is being expressed in a rational way. Everyone is entitled to an opinion but if a person is behaving in an irrational manner and you feel unsure about the situation do not persevere.

Dealing with Aggression inside a Property

There is always a risk that an occupant's behaviour may become erratic once you are in the household. If you find yourself unable to continue and have difficulty leaving the premises then you should:

- Trust your instinct – your fear is a better indicator of something threatening than looking for signs of anxiety in others. If you have any doubts do not enter a property.
- Remain as calm as possible. Remember your first duty is to yourself – never underestimate the threat. Try to diffuse the situation by talking calmly to the occupier.
- Remember that most people who become angered in a situation such as this are generally angry at an organisation or department, eg government, local health authority, etc. Try to make the occupant see you as an individual rather than a representative of an organisation.
- Never remain alone with an actively violent person - be prepared to move very quickly if possible. Keep talking but do not raise your voice. Be sympathetic with the occupant's point of view.
- "Understand" the occupant's point of view perhaps by saying that you've been in a similar situation / been angered by the same thing. This will hopefully make them see you as an ally rather than as an aggressor.
- Assure them that you will help them if you can.
- Never put a hand on someone who is angry.

- If the threat of violence is imminent avoid potentially dangerous locations such as the tops of stairs, restricted spaces, or places where there is equipment which could be picked up and used as a weapon against you.
- Keep your eye on potential escape routes, keep yourself between the aggressor and the door and, if possible, behind a barrier such as a table. Never turn your back if you are leaving but move gradually backwards.
- Think about your own body language – adopt an open, non-threatening posture. Show that you are actively listening by facing the aggressor, leaning forward slightly and keeping a neutral tone of voice.
- If the situation deteriorates, and they try to attack you, as a last resort arm yourself with anything that comes to hand. Try to fend them off and get them away from the door. Do not worry about any of your possessions. Run as quickly as you can from the property and summon help from anyone nearby. Report the matter to the police and to your manager as soon as possible.

Useful Travelling Items – Checklist

Below is a list of items you may find useful to keep with you or in your car for both work and private use. You might find certain items invaluable when you are working. How much you carry will depend on your own circumstances.

In winter you should also consider carrying chocolate bars, extra clothing or a blanket in your car if you are travelling long distances. In addition carrying a spade and some sacking to clear snow and give your wheels extra grip can be a good idea.

Personal

Emergency telephone number
Mobile phone
Personal alarm
Torch
High visibility jacket
Walking shoes

Car

Maps
First aid kit
Spare gallon of fuel in a safety approved container
Fire extinguisher
Warning triangle
Jump leads
Tow rope
Foot pump

...and know how to use them safely!