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Safety Benefits of Getting to Know Your Neighbors

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Because of the demands of jobs, PTA meetings, errands and family activities, the most we might see of our neighbors is a friendly wave or quick hello. But knowing your neighbors is one of the best ways to keep your family and neighborhood safe and prevent crime. Experts recommend befriending your immediate neighbors and becoming involved in community organizations.

Immediate neighbors

People who get to know their immediate neighbors—whether they live in a rural area, suburban neighborhood, townhouse community or apartment complex—are more likely to look out for each other, exchange occasional favors and enjoy where they live. Some ideas for neighborhood gatherings include block parties, potluck dinners, picnics and dessert and coffee get-togethers.

During these times, neighbors can share schedules and learn about cleaning people, gardeners, health care workers or other people who regularly visit next door. Find out which neighbors stay home during the day. If you develop a trusting relationship with a neighbor, you may consider exchanging house keys and work telephone numbers in case of an emergency. You also can let your neighbor know when you're going out of town, for example, or if you plan on having work done on your home. If you feel comfortable, you may want to bring up special concerns, such as a child's asthma or a neighbor with mental retardation.

Neighborhood associations

To keep your neighborhood safer and more crime-free, you also may consider joining a neighborhood association or starting one on your own. Associations provide a forum for increasing awareness, encourage volunteer participation and bolster neighborhood camaraderie. Together, you can work to solve problems that affect the community, such as cleaning up after pets, upkeep of common areas, speeding or limiting access to your apartment building. Groups also can implement crime prevention strategies. To make an association effective, make sure neighbors get invited to meetings, and hold meetings in a place with ample space. Churches, schools and municipal buildings often make rooms available.

Community action

If your neighborhood organization is looking for ways to take action, consider these possibilities:

- Establish a neighborhood watch program in conjunction with your local law enforcement agency to help reduce burglaries, vandalism, drug dealing, prostitution, mail theft and other crimes.
- Designate clearly marked “block homes” or “safe haven” houses where children can go if they are lost, frightened, hurt, threatened or involved in any emergency situation.
- Participate in the National Association of Town Watch’s program “National Night Out—America’s Night Out Against Crime.” On the first Tuesday in August, rally your neighbors to get involved by staying on the porch, keeping lights on and doing other crime- and drug-prevention activities. National Night Out also is a great time to sponsor block parties, marches and visits from law enforcement officials.
- Adopt a park or school playground. Pick up litter, repair broken equipment and paint over graffiti.

Sources:

The National Sheriffs' Association

www.sheriffs.org

National Association of Town Watch

www.nationaltownwatch.org

National Crime Prevention Council

www.ncpc.org

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