DARKER NIGHTS & MISCHIEF WEEK SAFETY GUIDANCE

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR FAMILIES DURING AUTUMN AND WINTER

As we move into the autumn and winter months, West Midlands Police have asked schools to share some helpful reminders and safety advice with families. The darker evenings, Halloween celebrations and Bonfire Night can bring additional risks, so it is important that we all take simple steps to stay safe.
In this Darker Nights & Mischief newsletter, you will find practical guidance on home security, personal safety, cycling, Halloween and Bonfire Night, together with useful links to videos, free posters, downloadable resources and further learning materials. We hope you find the information helpful in keeping yourselves, your children and your community safe over the coming months.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Plan ahead when travelling in the dark and help children and young people stay visible, aware and connected.

- Use well-lit, familiar routes. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Wear light coloured, bright or reflective clothing and carry a torch.
- Cyclists should use working lights and reflective equipment.
- Keep phones, headphones and other valuables out of sight when they are not needed. Stay aware of people, traffic and your surroundings.
- Enable device tracking and consider sharing your location with a trusted person. Do not visit an unknown location or confront anyone if a stolen device appears there; contact the police.
- Drivers should check lights and tyres, slow down in poor weather and look out for children, pedestrians, cyclists and pets.

FURTHER INFORMATION: PERSONAL SAFETY ADVICE | THINK! ROAD SAFETY | SUBMIT DASHCAM FOOTAGE

HOME SAFETY

Darker evenings can make an unoccupied or insecure home easier to spot. A few regular checks can help protect your home, vehicle and belongings.

- Lock doors, windows, porches, conservatories, side gates and other entry points, even when you are at home.
- Use timer switches for lights and close curtains or blinds so valuables cannot be seen from outside.
- Keep house and car keys out of sight and away from doors, windows and letterboxes.
- When you lock up before bed, double-check that your vehicle is locked. Consider a steering lock and, for keyless vehicles, a signal-blocking pouch (such as a faraday pouch).
- Use outside lighting, a working alarm, digital doorbell or CCTV where available. Check on neighbours who may need support.
- Even when you're home, remember to lock your front door and windows from the inside. Some front doors are often left unlocked when people are in making it easy for an opportunist thief to walk into your home.

FURTHER INFORMATION: HOME SECURITY ADVICE | REGISTER YOUR DIGITAL DOORBELL OR CCTV

BIKE SAFETY

Before setting off, check that the bike is roadworthy and that the rider can be seen clearly, particularly in poor light or after dark.

- Wear a correctly fitted cycle helmet that meets current safety regulations and is securely fastened.
- At night, use a working white front light and red rear light. The bike must also have a red rear reflector and the required amber pedal reflectors.
- Wear light-coloured or fluorescent clothing in daylight and poor light, and reflective clothing or accessories in the dark.
- Check the brakes, tyres, chain, lights and reflectors regularly. Make sure clothing, bags and laces cannot become caught in the wheels or chain.
- Use cycle lanes, tracks and safer routes where appropriate. Take extra care at junctions, driveways and crossings, and be prepared to slow down or stop for pedestrians.
- Lock bicycles securely with a good-quality D-lock through the frame and wheel, ideally in a busy, well-lit place near CCTV. Remove easily detachable items.

STAY VISIBLE. STAY SAFE. CHECK YOUR BIKE BEFORE EVERY RIDE.

FURTHER INFORMATION: HIGHWAY CODE RULES FOR CYCLISTS | OFFICIAL CYCLE-LIGHTING GUIDANCE | BICYCLE SECURITY

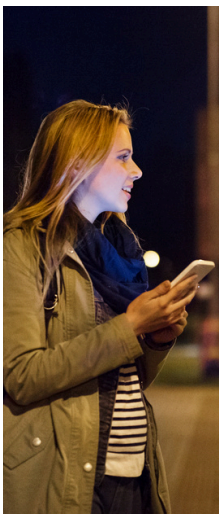
ROAD SAFETY

In the winter months, the nights get darker quicker, so it is important to stay alert when driving on the roads.

- Remember that the speed limit is a limit not a target. We can expect more rain, fog, and frost so take extra care.
- Slow down and drive safely - this October half term look out for children, pets, and other road users who might be out trick-or-treating.
- Check your headlights, brake lights, and tyres are all in working order – consider carrying out a weekend check of your vehicle.
- Kill your speed, put your phone away, and never get behind the wheel if you have been drinking.

HAVE YOU SEEN UNSAFE DRIVING? SUBMIT YOUR DASHCAM FOOTAGE HERE: OPERATION SNAP | WEST MIDLANDS POLICE

PHONE SAFETY



We see a spike in robbery and theft during the darker nights. It's easier for criminals to go undetected by digital doorbells, CCTV, and by dog walkers. Thieves target mobile phones, bags, and car keys. Stay alert this winter and keep your belongings out of sight. Here are a few tips to help keep you and your belongings safe this winter:

- Be aware of who is around you at the cash point. Use the machine inside a bank or building society if possible and alert bank staff to any suspicious activity
- Don't let headphones restrict your ability to hear traffic, strangers or potential trouble
- Never leave your mobile phone in plain sight on a bar or restaurant table. It may be within your reach, but it will also be within reach of a thief
- Don't hang your handbag on the back of a chair, out of your sight under a table or leave it unattended.
- Turn on your location or share your location with someone you trust so you can track your device.
- If your smart device pings in an unknown location do not visit the location or confront the individual without talking to the police.
- Enable two-factor authentication on iCloud or your child's phone, to make them less appealing to thieves.

FURTHER INFORMATION: PERSONAL SAFETY ADVICE

HALLOWEEN SAFETY

Halloween should be enjoyable while remaining safe and considerate to residents who may find unexpected callers upsetting.

- Children should trick-or-treat with a responsible adult or a trusted group and remain together.
- Use well-lit routes, carry a torch, wear bright or reflective clothing and agree a meeting point in case anyone becomes separated.
- Visit homes where residents are known or have clearly indicated that trick-or-treaters are welcome. Stay on the doorstep and never enter a home.
- ·Keep phones and valuables out of sight.
- Avoid behaviour that could frighten others or damage property, including throwing eggs or flour.
- Respect "no trick or treaters" notices and avoid disturbing people who are elderly, vulnerable, live alone or do not wish to take part.
- Remember road safety at all times, especially when crossing roads or moving between parked vehicles.
- If Halloween is not something you enjoy, display a "no trick or treaters" poster and do not feel pressured to answer unexpected callers. Use a door chain, spy hole or video doorbell if available.

FURTHER INFORMATION: HALLOWEEN AND DARKER NIGHTS GUIDANCE **|** DOWNLOAD THE NO TRICK-OR-TREATERS POSTER | PARENTS' SAFETY GUIDE

BONFIRE NIGHT & FIREWORK SAFETY

The safest option is to attend an organised display and leave fireworks to trained organisers. If fireworks are used at home, follow the instructions and official safety guidance carefully.

- Buy fireworks from licensed or registered sellers and check that they meet current safety standards.
- Only responsible adults should handle and light fireworks.
- Store them in a closed box and take them out one at a time.
- It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to possess a firework, flare or smoke bomb.
- Keep spectators well back. Light fireworks at arm's length and never return to one that has been lit.
- Never carry fireworks in a pocket, throw them, set them off in a street or public place, or place spent fireworks on a bonfire.
- Do not drink alcohol if you are responsible for fireworks.
- Sparklers - wear gloves, hold at arm's length, place used sparklers hot-end down in a bucket of cold water or sand. **Do not give sparklers to children under five.**
- Tell neighbours in advance, keep pets safely indoors and be considerate of people, animals and wildlife affected by noise.
- Fireworks are generally permitted between 7am and 11pm. The Bonfire Night exception extends to midnight.

FURTHER INFORMATION: FIREWORK LAW AND REPORTING | WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE ADVICE| SPARKLER SAFETY | FIREWORK CODE