

AFTER **NORMAL**

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

The short version: the few things that matter, in points you can read in ten minutes.

YOU DO NOT NEED A COMMITTEE. YOU NEED ONE GOOD NEIGHBOR, A SIGNAL AND A PLAN.

For: Anyone who wants to feel safer and steadier at home, especially older adults, people with health limits, people who live alone and the families who look out for them.



KEEP THIS PAGE

THE ONE-PAGE VERSION

- 1 Start the first conversation: knock, say your first name, and swap phone numbers with your nearest neighbor. (Section 2)
- 2 Have the second conversation with someone observant on your block: the early riser, the shift worker, the person whose dogs miss nothing. (Section 2)
- 3 Have the third conversation with a contact outside your area who can pass messages if local phones fail. (Section 2)
- 4 Agree a check-in signal anyone can see from the street, with two meanings: 'I am OK' and 'come to my door'. (Section 2)
- 5 Ask one person to hear from you at a set hour every day, and to come or send someone if they do not. Keep a phone within reach and a whistle by your bed. Ask before you need to. (Section 2)
- 6 Find your one good neighbor with three questions: would they notice, would they act, would they respect a limit? Answer from what you have already seen, on a calm afternoon. (Section 3)
- 7 Give something back: a spare key, or the fact that you are home all day and see the street. (Section 3)
- 8 Share information and help freely. Keep your pantry, your absences and your health details to yourself. Quiet is not lying. (Sections 2 and 4)
- 9 With a neighbor who takes more than they give, use a short, kind sentence and stick to it. (Section 4)
- 10 If a neighbor threatens or frightens you: do not confront, keep your distance, write down dates and facts, call the police non-emergency line, and call 911 if anyone is in immediate danger. (Section 5)
- 11 Check on neighbors who live alone, politely, in an outage, storm or heat wave. Worried about someone's mood? Call or text 988 for advice. (Sections 3, 5 and 6)
- 12 Save these numbers now: 911, 988, and your local police non-emergency number (look it up for your town). Write them on your Check-in card.

BEFORE YOU START

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- ☐ Read **page 2** first. It is the whole guide on one page.
- ☐ This week, do just one thing: the first conversation with your nearest neighbor.
- ☐ Fill in the Check-in card and put it on the fridge.
- ☐ Judge only what you have actually seen a person do. Never judge by looks, accent, age, religion, race or income. Keep your thinking private.

Important notice. This guide is general educational information, not legal, security, medical or emergency advice, and not a security or legal service. Laws, police practice and welfare-check practice differ by state and town. Follow local officials and police if their advice differs. Information reflects the listed sources as of October 2026. Parts are the publisher's own advice and are labeled. In an emergency call 911. For an emotional crisis in the US, call or text 988.

PART 1

1. WHY NEIGHBORS MATTER

TIP

Ground rules. Judge only behavior you have seen yourself, never looks, accent, age, religion, race, immigration status or income. The sorting is private thinking: no files on people, no watching, no gossip. Quiet is not lying, and it is never refusing basic help: you still share information, a warm room or a phone charge where it is safe to.

PART 2

2. KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS: THE THREE CONVERSATIONS

THE THREE CONVERSATIONS

- 1 Your nearest neighbor.
Whoever lives closest. They will be first to see smoke or hear a fall. Swap first names and phone numbers. If you only do one, do this one.
- 2 Someone on your block who notices things.
The neighbor up at 5 a.m., the family whose dogs bark at anything, the shift worker awake while the street sleeps. Ask them to tell you if something looks wrong, and promise to do the same.
- 3 A contact outside your area.
A relative or friend in another city or state who can relay messages if local phones fail. Everyone in your circle should have the number.

WHAT TO SAY: SCRIPTS FOR A SHY PERSON

Ask only what you would be happy to answer yourself.

MOMENT	YOU COULD SAY
The first knock	Hi, I'm ___ from number ___. I realized I don't know anyone on the street and wanted to say hello.
Swapping numbers	I'm making a list of phone numbers in case the power goes out. Would you like to swap?

MOMENT	YOU COULD SAY
A small favor, returned	Would you keep an eye on the house while I'm away next week? I'll do the same for you. (Say this only to your one trusted neighbor.)
If they seem busy	No problem at all. Here's my number. Take care. (Respect a limit. Try again in a few weeks.)

SET A CHECK-IN SIGNAL AND A DAILY CONTACT

Our own advice. Test the signal once on a normal day.

- 1 Choose a signal visible from the street.
A curtain in a certain window, a flag, a cloth on the gate. It should mean something to your circle without telling a stranger that you live alone. Give it two meanings: 'I am OK' and 'come to my door'.
- 2 Pick one person who hears from you at the same hour each day.
If they do not, they come or send someone: 'If you don't hear from me by 9, please knock.'
- 3 Keep a phone within reach and a whistle where you sleep.
A whistle carries through a wall. A shout does not.
- 4 Ask before you need to.
Pride has kept more people quiet than any storm.

CHECK-IN CARD (FOR THE FRIDGE)

Share only with people you have chosen.

Our signal: I am OK / come to my door

Daily contact: name, phone, hour

Who I check on, and how

Out-of-area contact: name and phone

Police non-emergency number (look it up) and 911 / 988

PART 3**3. THE GOOD NEIGHBOR: RELIABLE, NOT JUST FRIENDLY****THE THREE SORTING QUESTIONS**

They answer these, by how they already behave. You do not interview, test or watch anyone.

QUESTION	WHAT YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE SEEN
Would they NOTICE?	They mention your packages, a light left on, a trash can that never went out. If your curtains stayed shut past noon, they would notice.
Would they ACT?	They have walked over and knocked, called or taken your trash can in. Noticing is easy. Knocking is the part most people skip.
Would they RESPECT A LIMIT?	When you said no, they accepted it without sulking, pressing or telling others. If you said 'we have enough for our own household', would they hear information, or a challenge?

KEEP IT SMALL: ONE RELATIONSHIP, BUILT PROPERLY

A retired nurse two doors down can be worth more than a first aid kit you have never opened. Skills live in people.

- 1** Pick one person who fits the three questions so far as you have seen.
Not a committee, not a dozen names in a group thread.
- 2** Tell them what you need.
'My knees are bad. In an emergency I may need more time to get to the door.'
- 3** Give something back. ^{s1}
A spare key. Being home all day and seeing the street. A morning call. Trust runs both ways.
- 4** Share the plan and practice it once. ^{s1}
Ready.gov advises older adults to build a support network, make sure at least one person has an extra key and knows where supplies are kept, and practice the plan with them. Choose that one person carefully.

PART 4**4. THE BAD NEIGHBOR: A DRAIN, NOT A VILLAIN****KIND LIMITS: WHAT TO SAY**

Short, calm and repeatable. Never argue or justify. End the chat kindly. If anyone pushes, raises their voice or you feel unsafe, go inside and see Section 5.

WHEN A NEIGHBOR SAYS OR DOES THIS	YOU COULD SAY
'If anything happens I'll come to yours.'	Glad you asked. We'll help where we can, but I can't promise to be your plan. Come over Saturday and I'll help you start on yours.

WHEN A NEIGHBOR SAYS OR DOES THIS	YOU COULD SAY
'What have you got in there?'	Enough for our own household. I'm happy to share what I know, like where the nearest shelter is.
Borrows and does not return	I need that back by Friday. After that I can't lend any more.
Gossip	I'd rather not talk about them. Have you asked them?
Keeps pushing after you say no	I've said what I can do. That's my answer. I wish you well.

PART 5

5. THE UGLY NEIGHBOR: RARE, AND NOT YOURS TO CONFRONT

IF A NEIGHBOR THREATENS, HARASSES OR FRIGHTENS YOU

Our own advice, in line with police and victim-services guidance on logging and reporting. Laws and what police can do differ by state and town.

- 1 Do not confront, argue or go to their door.
Keep a polite distance. Do not post accusations online. Do not follow, film or record them. Go inside if you can.
- 2 If anyone is in immediate danger, or someone threatens to hurt you or others, call 911. ^{s7}
- 3 Write down dates and facts. ^{s8}
Date, time, what happened, who saw. Keep texts and voicemails they sent you. Photograph damage to your own property. Keep it factual and private. Do not film or record people: recording laws differ by state.
- 4 For repeated problems, call the police non-emergency line. ^{s7}
Search online for your local agency's number and save it now. Ask for a report number and add it to your log.
- 5 Tell people you trust, and ask about your options.
Your good neighbor, family, landlord or association. Ask police or a local victim services group what is available where you live.

IS IT UGLY?

IF	THEN
A noise, fence, dog or parking dispute	An ordinary dispute. If you feel safe, talk once, then ask about community mediation. (S9, S11)
Threats, repeated unwanted contact, following, watching, damage	Do not confront. Write down facts, call the non-emergency line, tell people you trust. (S7, S8)

IF	THEN
Anyone in immediate danger, a threat to hurt someone, or a crime in progress	Call 911. (S7)

TIP

Call or text 988 (US) for advice on how to help. The 988 Lifeline is open 24 hours a day, free and confidential, by call, text or chat, and it is for people worried about someone else as well as people in crisis. ^{S10}

WARNING

Never use this sorting to decide who deserves help in a medical emergency. If anyone is hurt, unconscious or in danger, call 911 for them, whoever they are.

PART 6**6. AFTER AN EVENT: USING YOUR CIRCLE****THE FIRST HOUR**

FIRST 10 MINUTES	Check your own household. Put your check-in signal in the window: 'I am OK' or 'come to my door'.
10 TO 30 MINUTES	Look for your good neighbor's signal or send a text. Check the neighbors you agreed to look in on. A knock at arm's length is fine. ^{S5}
30 TO 45 MINUTES	Look in on neighbors who live alone or have health problems, as agreed. Ask if they have a phone, a light and a safe way to keep warm or cool. ^{S4, S5}
45 TO 60 MINUTES	Share what you know on the porch: blocked roads, the nearest shelter or cooling place. Agree the next check-in time. Message your out-of-area contact.

SOURCES**WHERE THE FACTS COME FROM**

1. **S1** Ready.gov (FEMA) - Older Adults
<https://www.ready.gov/older-adults>
2. **S4** Ready.gov (FEMA) - Extreme Heat
<https://www.ready.gov/heat>
3. **S5** CDC - About Heat and Your Health
<https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html>
4. **S7** USA.gov - Report a Crime
<https://www.usa.gov/report-crime>
5. **S8** SPARC (stalkingawareness.org) - Documentation Log
<https://www.stalkingawareness.org/documentation-log/>

6. **S10** 988 Lifeline
<https://988lifeline.org/>

After Normal: calm, practical preparedness. More free tools and guides at afternormal.co. This guide is free to share with a neighbor.