



Virtual Neighborhood Watch Guide

In partnership with National Neighborhood Watch,
a division of the National Sheriffs' Association



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Introduction

Hello neighbors - thank you for making time to learn about Nextdoor and how you can better use our neighborhood app to facilitate a Virtual Neighborhood Watch for you and neighbors.

All of us at Nextdoor are honored to partner with the National Sheriffs' Association by contributing to this guide. The work done across the country by our first responding agencies is vital to the safety of our communities. We hope this guide will help with your part in keeping your neighborhood to build a stronger, more connected community.

In addition to sharing how you and your neighbors can use Nextdoor, we have included crime prevention tips created by Nextdoor law enforcement partners. With thousands of public agency partners around the world, our commitment to keeping neighborhoods safe is still key to our mission. We hope you will join our efforts by sharing with neighbors online in your Nextdoor neighborhood.

When neighbors start talking, good things happen. And because of dedicated neighbors like you, together we're keeping communities connected and neighborhoods safe. Nextdoor is free to residents and public agencies. You may download the app for Apple and Android devices or sign up at www.nextdoor.com. If your local police, fire, and emergency management agency is not yet using Nextdoor, let them know they can get started at www.nextdoor.com/agency.

Happy neighboring!

The Nextdoor for Public Agencies Team 



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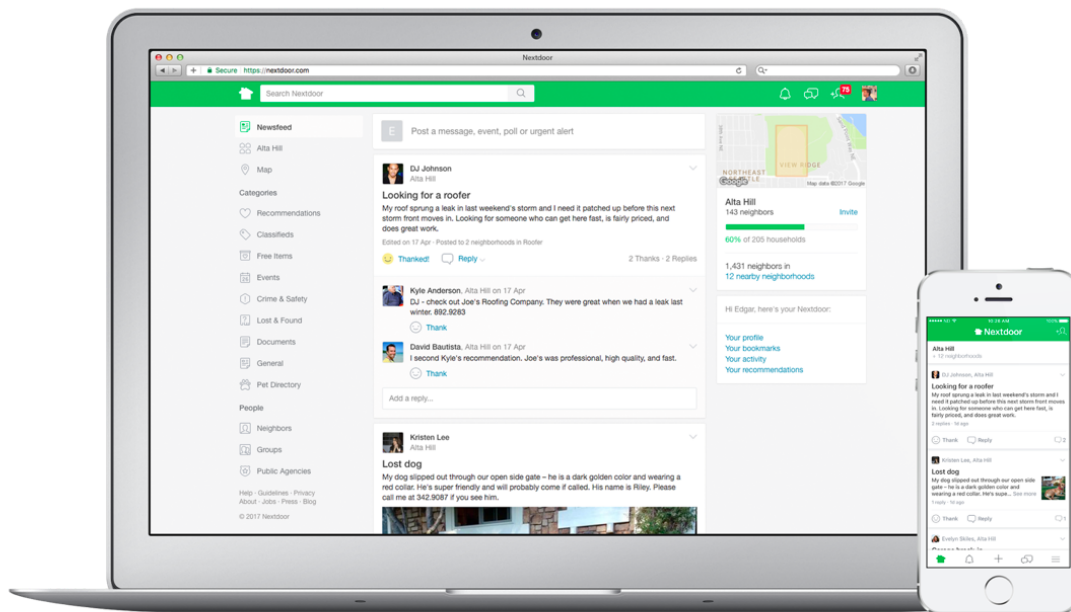
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What is Nextdoor?

Nextdoor is the world's leading social network for the neighborhood that connects neighbors in more than 237,000 neighborhoods across the globe. Nextdoor enables truly local conversations that empower neighbors to build stronger and safer communities.

Since day one, Nextdoor has been a platform built on trust. Nextdoor is made up of real people at real addresses. By requiring members to use their real name and verified address, Nextdoor creates trust and accountability. This encourages neighbors to take online conversations offline, leads to healthier and productive dialogue, and inspires neighbors to lend a helping hand.



Everything at Nextdoor is built on the power of local. It's what brings people to Nextdoor and what makes it an essential part of neighbors' lives. Neighbors connect on Nextdoor to find trusted, useful, and relevant local information to address their daily needs, while forming relationships in the real world to build safer, happier places to call home.

Thousands of public agency departments have partnered with Nextdoor to convey critical, targeted messaging including crime and safety updates from police, fire, and emergency management agencies.



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How do neighbors use Nextdoor for Virtual Neighborhood Watch?

One of the hardest parts about running a neighborhood watch group is getting neighbors involved and keeping them involved over time, especially when there is not a lot of crime. It's also really hard to get people to attend meetings regularly.

To address crime and the fear of crime effectively, you need to have the majority of the neighbors on your street and neighborhood actively practice crime prevention methods. For example, if only a couple of neighbors are removing valuables from their cars and locking their car doors, there are still plenty of opportunities for theft. The question then becomes, how do we get more people involved? This is where Nextdoor comes in.

Because so many of your neighbors are already likely using Nextdoor, you and your neighbors have instant access to communicate easily and quickly - and you will be able to reach neighbors who are not yet involved in crime prevention efforts (and who may not be paying attention).

And while it's critical to meet in person and do activities together such as clean ups, walks and stoop sits as these positive activities displace negative activities like crime, it is not possible for all your neighbors to meet in person. Communicating virtually on Nextdoor is the next best thing!

Keep in mind that when you do meet in person, or you meet a new neighbor, use the invitation feature in the app to send them a text message inviting them to join Nextdoor. When they do, you and your neighbors will be able to stay in touch easily!

Nextdoor was built from the ground up for neighbors and offers features built specifically to help neighbors communicate about crime & safety issues.

- [Groups](#) - you can create a private group just for you and your immediate neighbors or you can share information with everyone in your greater neighborhood.
- [Urgent alerts](#) - Unlike a regular message, an "urgent alert" sends a text message to all members signed up to receive texts, a push notification for those using the Nextdoor app, and immediate email to all of the neighbors in your neighborhood or group. Urgent alerts are intended for the rare cases where information is very important and time-sensitive.
- [Public agencies](#) - Nextdoor offers a free government interface used by thousands of public agencies who send locally pertinent information such as details about a rash of break-ins.
- [Resources and steps to prevent racial profiling](#) - We want everyone on Nextdoor to feel welcome in their own neighborhood. But there are times when people post messages that cause neighbors to be treated differently based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics. By learning how to identify unconscious bias and respond to racial profiling, we can help all of our neighbors feel safe in the places they call home.

Below are common ways neighbors use Nextdoor to facilitate neighborhood watch.

	As needed: post messages about <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Property crime trends you may observe
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<p>Inform & Educate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incident-specific information you may know ● Crime prevention tips you learned <p>Educate your neighbors by posting polls (see more examples in suggested posts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which option best describes the last time you called 911 to report suspicious activity? ● Do you use window stops? ● Do you leave your outdoor lighting on all night long? ● Which option best describes what you do with your valuables when you park your car?
<p>Activate (As needed)</p>	<p>As needed: post messages to encourage your neighbors to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attend a local meeting, workshop or training ● Identify and report suspicious behavior and crime to the police ● Become a member of your neighborhood watch group ● Attend your neighborhood watch meetings <p>As needed: post urgent alerts after you've called 911 to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicate about criminally suspicious behaviors you've witnessed ● Be on the lookout for someone behaving suspiciously and call 911 if they also see the person/vehicle on their street <p>As needed: post discussion and polls to gather information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did you observe someone walking down the street looking into vehicle windows and wiggling door handles? ● Ask people to reply with links to video footage during certain times to see if their cameras captured helpful footage

Best practices to drive engagement

- Subject line - Keep them short and sweet: tell your neighbors what is happening and where.
- Tone - Write in a neighborly tone as if you were speaking to your neighbors in your living room.
- Answer questions - Nextdoor members want to have conversations, they don't want you to push content at them.
- Photos - Every post including polls should have a photo, as pictures capture people's attention. Wider photos look better than taller ones.
- Videos - Post videos by including URL links to Vimeo, YouTube, and Facebook videos
- Attachments - Do not attach Word documents as most people will receive your message on their mobile phones and don't have Microsoft Word. Save Word docs as PDFs or PNGs to get more eyes on your content. Always include the who, what, where, when, and why in the body of the message.



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How to communicate about crime on Nextdoor

The heart and soul of Nextdoor are the helpful conversations that happen between neighbors. To this end, it is crucial that all neighbors feel welcome, safe and respected. Follow the guidelines below to ensure that you and all your neighbors feel welcome on Nextdoor.

Be Safe

Don't put yourself in harm's way or engage a suspect to gather more details about the situation. Your safety is paramount.

Call 911

If you think that a crime may be occurring, or that the safety of you or your neighbors may be at risk, do not hesitate to call 911. You shouldn't worry about using up police time. Calls to 911 will be prioritized based on availability of law enforcement.

Even if you are unsure as to what is going on, the best thing to do is to let the police investigate. When the police catch someone in the act of breaking into a home, or stealing something, it is not unusual that one person is responsible for multiple other crimes in a neighborhood, and once caught, crime will decrease.

When to use an Urgent Alert vs. a regular post

Post an Urgent Alert if someone's safety or property is at risk and if the issue has occurred within the last 10 minutes. If you just witnessed the behavior, call 911. Then [post an Urgent Alert](#) so that your neighbors will be notified of the situation by both email and text message.

Remember that Urgent Alerts are limited to 110 characters, so you'll need to be descriptive, yet concise. (You can add more details later by replying to the Urgent alert, if needed.)

Here's an example of an Urgent Alert that communicates suspicious behavior in a concise way:

Man on Main trying to break into car. Wh/male bl/pants rd/shirt, Nikes, scar on cheek - See him, call 911.

If it has been more than 10 minutes, post your report as a message in the Crime & Safety category.

How to post your Crime & Safety message to help everyone in your neighborhood stay safe

1. What - focus on the behavior that raised your suspicion. Describe the potentially criminal or dangerous activity you observed or experienced - what the person was doing, what they said (if they spoke to you). Include the direction they were last headed.



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2. Who - give as full a description as possible of the person, people, or vehicles involved. Include as many details as possible - age, height, weight, hair, clothing, and identifiable marks, not just sex and race. For vehicles, make, model, plate, and direction of travel are helpful.
3. Where - location matters. Provide specific streets or intersections whenever possible. If the location is in a large area such as a park, provide a landmark within that location where the incident occurred (e.g. "at Rogers Park, next to the restrooms").

What behaviors do police consider to be suspicious?

While the behaviors listed below have been known to be consistent with criminal activity, it is entirely possible that there is a simple explanation for what you are seeing. For example, a person observed trying the handles of vehicles may be misinformed as to which car belongs to a friend or family member; a person observed loitering within a park may be a neighbor's relative making a phone call before heading inside.

Consider the context. Take, for example, a person sitting in a parked car across the street. During the day, someone might pull over to make a phone call or send a text message and then drive away. At night, the context has changed, especially if the lights in the vehicle are off in a residential neighborhood.

Police associate these behaviors with potential criminal activity:

- Someone walking down the street looking into multiple vehicles and/or trying door handles to see if the doors will open.
- Someone taking a package from someone else's property (keep in mind that sometimes neighbors leave or pick up packages for other neighbors).
- A person who is not your neighbor walking about your neighbor's home and looking into windows, or trying to gain access by forcing open a window or door.
- A person knocking on your door and asking to speak with someone who does not live there and who may also go to other homes knocking on doors. This is a tactic used by people with the intent to burglarize to see if people are home. (Keep in mind that people may also mistakenly go to the wrong home for any number of reasons.)
- Someone claiming to represent a utility company who is either not wearing a uniform, does not produce identification upon request, or does not have a company logo vehicle.
- Someone using binoculars or other devices to peer into your or your neighbors' homes.
- At night, a person sitting inside a vehicle that you do not recognize with the lights off for an extended period of time.
- A pushy salesperson not producing identification upon your request or asking to come into your home.
- A vehicle you do not recognize that is circling multiple times around the neighborhood.
- An unusually high flow of people coming and going from a particular home and visiting for just a couple of minutes. (NOTE: Police prefer that you report this to them, rather than post about it.)



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- Feeling you are being followed when walking home or to a neighbor's home, even after you cross the street and back again and the person(s) crosses along with you.
- Sales crews selling products door to door saying they need to make a quota and who refuse to produce identification upon your request. (The criminal activity may not be what you think. These salespeople may be victims of labor traffickers and can be reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline 1 (888) 373-7888. For more information, [read this article on new research about this type of crime.](#))

Why is giving a full description so important?

In the rush of posting about a person or situation that concerns them, many people identify the person involved simply by sex and race. This is a problem for a couple of reasons:

1. It doesn't give your neighbors enough detail to identify the suspect.
2. It casts suspicion on every person of that sex and race who may legitimately be in or live in your neighborhood.

For example, if you saw this post, how would you know who to be on the lookout for?

Suspicious car in neighborhood: Black male in blue Ford sedan doing drive-bys on Shelby Street, near my house at 52 Shelby. Didn't get a photo of the car. Never seen this car before. Keep eyes open.

If you saw this post, you'd know who to look for. However, there is no information that supports the allegation of suspicious behavior:

Look out for suspicious male: There is a black guy, early twenties, walking up and down Arden Avenue, wearing blue jeans and a black hoodie. Please be on the lookout.

The post below describes a behavior that is known to be consistent with criminal activity (trying door handles of multiple cars) and does a better job of helping your neighbors be on the lookout for a specific person rather than a whole race of people, and makes sure that any other Hispanic male who happens to be walking down the street doesn't get pulled over when the police arrive.

Guy checking door handles on Oak and Main: Earlier today at 3:00 pm, I witnessed suspicious behavior on Main and Oak streets. The guy was walking down Main Street looking into vehicles and trying the door handles of multiple cars. He was a tall Hispanic male and was wearing dark blue jeans, a red t-shirt, Nike sneakers, and had a scar on his right arm. I called 911 and reported what I saw.

Please remember, Nextdoor's Community Guidelines prohibit racial profiling. Racial profiling includes assuming someone is suspicious because of their race or ethnicity, or giving descriptions of suspects that are so vague as to cast suspicion over an entire race or ethnicity. You can read



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the specific guideline [here](#). Posts that violate Nextdoor guidelines may be removed and the member posting may be suspended.

Why does Nextdoor prohibit discriminatory racial code words?

The heart and soul of Nextdoor are the helpful conversations that happen between neighbors. To this end, it is crucial that all neighbors feel welcome, safe and respected. Therefore we do not allow racial code words that demean members of a given race, such as "AA" for African-American or "oriental" when referring to Asian-Americans, or language that reduces someone's humanity, for example referring to people as "animals" or "scum." Please see our [Community Guidelines](#) regarding discrimination and hate speech.

Conclusion

Thank you for making time to read this guide and for all you do in your communities. It's neighbors like you who step up to the plate, take action, and inspire others to take action as well that makes a difference in neighborhoods.

Be sure to also check out our supplemental messages document for powerful crime prevention tips you can copy, paste, and share with your neighbors on Nextdoor.

Again - thanks for all you do, neighbor!

Happy neighboring!

The Nextdoor for Public Agencies Team 



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