

The Safety House Program

The Safety House Program was first introduced at Wooranna Park Primary School, Dandenong North in 1979. Prior to its introduction, there had been unofficial reports of some 12 approaches to children in the area in a three-month period.

The Safety House Association of Victoria Inc. was soon formed, and now there are approximately 140 local committees covering more than 180 schools, with approximately 7,000 registered Safety Houses in Victoria.

What is the Safety House Program?

The Safety House Program is a positive step that any community can take to help make the streets safer for our children and our senior citizens. It is something the whole community can be involved in. Basically, the program involves establishing a network of Safety Houses in a local area. These are houses that children and senior citizens can use if they meet with trouble whilst they are out and about in their community.

The broad aims of the program are:

- To provide community assistance to children and senior citizens when they feel unsafe when travelling about in their community.
- Through a network of Safety Houses, to provide a reliable means for children and senior citizens to get help as quickly as possible, by going to a safe place and a helpful person as quickly as possible.
- To deter undesirable people from entering local areas through the prominent and permanent display of Safety House signs.
- To alert the wider community to the dangers faced by children and senior citizens when commuting about in their community.

- To encourage children to gain the health benefits that walking and exercising in their local community can offer.

What's involved?

People who would like their house or business designated as a Safety House can apply to their local Safety House Committee. As part of our security, each person in the house or business, aged 17 years or over, is screened and interviewed by the local committee and then undergoes a national police check. All information obtained is strictly confidential.

When prospective Safety Householders are interviewed, several factors are considered:

- Does the house have a telephone?
- Is someone normally at home during the times children are normally moving about in their community?
- Is there a dog on the premises?
- Are there any other factors that may deter a child or a senior citizen from approaching or entering the premises?

How do children know about Safety Houses?

One of the major aspects of the Safety House Program is the education of children and adults.

Children are educated to recognise the Safety House sign and to trust their feelings and instincts about people and situations. Teaching children to be aware of their feelings helps them to identify potentially unsafe people and situations. Children are then taught what to do at times when they do not feel safe. This is a vital part of helping children to look after their own safety.

Safe ways to travel to and from school and



when they visit friends after school and on weekends are also dealt with in the classroom. It is emphasised that Safety Houses can be used at anytime but are only for times of genuine need and that the Safety House householder will call the police so that the police can advise them as to what action they will need to take.

Parents and interested adults are also informed about the program. Their interest, enthusiasm and involvement are vital to success.

Our thanks to the Victoria Police, Community Consultation and Crime Prevention Office for contributing this section.

Information for children

Feeling unsure? Knock on a Safety House door.

What is a Safety House?

A Safety House is a place where you can go for help if you feel unsafe, frightened or unsure. The people in a Safety House have had special police and community checks so you know that they are safe people who can be trusted to help you. Children can go to a Safety House any time of the day or night to get help.

A Safety house can be:

- A house
- A shop
- A business premise
- A shopping centre
- A hospital or police station

When might I need to use a Safety House?

Anytime you are away from home, either alone or with a friend. Maybe you are going to the shops, school, your friend's house, or playing at a park (or skate park). You can go to a Safety House whenever you need help. If you were:

- Frightened by someone
- Feeling unsafe
- Hurt
- Lost
- Being bullied
- Feeling scared
- Frightened by animals
- Approached by a stranger who makes you feel unsafe
- Being watched or followed
- In need of help for any other reason.

When you are out walking, riding or playing, Safety Houses are there to help keep you safe.

How do I find a Safety House?

Look for the yellow Safety House sign, the triangle with a 'smiley' face. The sign could be:

- On a letterbox
- Near the front of a house
- On the front fence
- On the front gatepost
- In the front window of a shop.

How do I use a Safety House?

At a house: Go to the front door and knock loudly or ring the doorbell.

At a shop: Go to the front counter or look for one of the people working at the Safety House.

Tell the person what your problem is and why you feel unsafe. The Safety House person will get help for you.

What happens if I use a Safety House?

If you use a Safety House the person will ask you for your name and address and what happened and then they will ring the police. The police will decide if they need to attend and they will advise the Safety House person what to do.

Safety at public events

What happens if you are in a crowd and get separated from your family or friends? What should you do if you are lost in a shopping centre, or other crowded area?

Be prepared – plan ahead:

- Make sure you know your address and phone number and a parent's mobile number if they have one.
- Decide on a meeting spot beforehand so everyone will know where to go if they are separated. In large shopping centres this might be the information counter. At an AFL football stadium it may be a numbered stand entrance.
- Seek help from someone reliable like a shop employee, police or security officer, or failing that, an adult in a family group.

Have some family safety rules:

- If children become separated from parents, they should not search but go straight to the designated meeting place.
- Explain to children to seek help from someone like a shop employee, security officer or an adult in a family group.
- If someone offers them a lift, children should say no and go straight to a shop or Safety House location.
- If someone grabs them, children should struggle and scream out something like 'I don't know this person', 'this is not my mum/dad', making as much noise as they can.

Feeling unsure?

Not all strangers are bad but we need to be wary of people we do not know. If a situation does not feel right, ask yourself these three questions:

- 1 Do I feel safe with this person?
- 2 Do my parents know where I am?
- 3 Can I get help if I need it?

If you answer **no** to any one of these questions, **do not go**. Remember – One no, don't go.

You have the right to be safe. **Always**.

Remember – Safety House is for every child.

Safety on public transport

As children get older they also become more independent and often secondary school involves travelling by public transport. So if travelling on a bus, a train or a tram, be careful. Stop! Look! Listen! Whenever you are near trains, trams, buses or rail lines, Think!

At the bus, train or tram stop

- Stay well back from the roadside or well away from the edge of a train platform.
- While waiting, children should be in a group.
- At night, wait in a well-lit area.
- Always wait until the vehicle stops completely before going near the door.
- Never try to open the door when a train or tram is still moving.
- Wait for other passengers to get off first.
- Don't push or shove others when getting on the vehicle.

Riding on the bus, train or tram

- Be courteous to drivers, they have the important job of getting everyone to their destinations safely.
- Check bags are not blocking the aisle.
- If you are travelling by yourself, sit near the front of the vehicle, or near regular passengers or people you recognise.
- If someone sits or stands close to you so that you feel uncomfortable, be polite but move seats.

Leaving the train or tram

- Look out for your stop and be ready to leave the vehicle without having to rush.
- Once you are off, stand well back.
- Never try to cross a road before the tram has moved away.
- Never cross the road or train/tram track until you can see clearly both ways.
- Don't cross the road in front of a tram or between parked cars.

What else should you do?

- Keep your property close to you at all times.
- It is a good idea to always carry a phone card or money for a phone call.
- Ring home if you will be late.
- Don't be afraid to look for a police officer, public transport staff or a Safety House if you have any problem. You are important and your safety is your first priority.

What happens if you miss your tram or train?

Anyone can have a bad day. You may miss the tram or the train may be cancelled, so what are you going to do to make sure that you are safe and that people at home are not getting worried

when you don't turn up on time?

This is something important that you need to discuss with your parents before it happens. You need to work out a plan of what you would do and then stick to the plan. You will know how you are getting home and your parents will know exactly the same thing.

For resources and further information: The Safety House Association of Victoria Inc.

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Our thanks to the Safety House Association for contributing this section.