

Be safe at uni



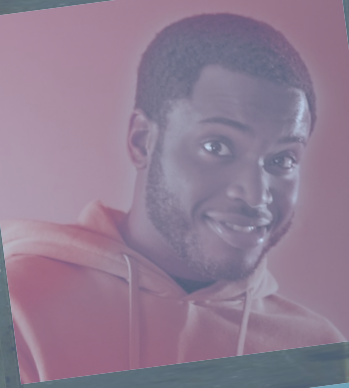
A guide to all the help and advice you need to stay safe while you study in the West Midlands.



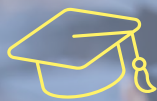
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Introduction

Making student life a safer place for you.

Student life can be hard to navigate. As well as making friends, finding your way around campus and juggling lectures, it's also important to keep your safety in mind – especially if you're living away from home for the first time.

That's why we're here. We've created this handy guide to give you lots of information on how to keep yourself, your belongings and your accommodation safe and secure, as well as to help you stay on the right side of the law.

Our hope is that this guide will empower you to make informed decisions that prioritise your wellbeing, enabling you to fully embrace all the opportunities and experiences that student life has to offer.

So, let's begin!



The essentials



Starting uni is an exciting time and we know there are lots of things you'll be focusing on right now. While they are all important, make sure to add these to your to-do list as well:

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- ☒ Pick up a map of campus to help you get around safely
 - ☒ Research bus and train timetables, local taxi firm numbers and relevant travel apps
 - ☒ Buy a steering wheel lock if you're bringing a car
 - ☒ Get a D-lock for your bike
 - ☒ Sort out contents insurance
 - ☒ Make a list of your possessions including the make, model and serial numbers, as well as photos of your valuables for reference
 - ☒ Get a home security marking kit to label your possessions with
 - ☒ Register all your valuables for free at www.immobilise.com
 - ☒ Set up a UK bank or building society account to keep your money secure
 - ☒ Make a note of contact details for your bank if your cards get lost or stolen
 - ☒ Create a list of emergency contacts



Home security

Keeping your accommodation safe and secure is essential for your wellbeing and peace of mind. Here are some steps you can take:

- Lock your windows and doors – this may seem obvious, but it's easy to forget to lock up when you're in a rush. Make sure all windows and doors are locked, even if you're only popping out for five minutes.
- Keep valuables out of sight – don't leave expensive items like laptops, phones and jewellery on display in your room. Stash them away in a secure location where they can't be seen from outside.
- Don't share your key or access code – you never know who could be accessing your living space.
- Watch out for tailgating – be mindful of who's following you into your building and ask them to show you some ID if you feel comfortable to do so.
- Get insurance and register all your tech at www.immobilise.com
- Purchase some inexpensive light timers that you can use when you go out, so it looks like someone is inside.
- If you live in shared accommodation, don't assume there is someone else in who will make it secure when you go out. Discuss security rules and make sure you all agree to keep the place secure at all times.
- Leave your keys in a safe place that's easy to find, but don't keep them in sight near doors, windows or the letterbox.



Looking for a new home

Moving into student housing can be an exciting, yet nerve-racking experience. Your university will be able to help you with the search, but here are some things to bear in mind when viewing properties.

- Rent from a reputable landlord.
- View the house before you commit – check for security measures such as good locks and lockable windows.
- If possible, take someone with you when viewing prospective accommodation. If going alone, share the address and your expected return time with a friend.
- Think about the location of your new home and how easy and safe it will be to travel to and from it.
- Try and view the neighbourhood both by day and night to get a sense of how safe you'd feel there.
- When moving into the new accommodation, don't leave luggage or belongings outside or in the open boot of a car.
- Speak to your university's accommodation support services for more advice.

Keeping personal belongings safe

From laptops and tablets, to wallets and phones, these items are essential to your academic and personal life. Here's how to help keep them safe:

- Keep your belongings with you at all times – don't leave your bag or other valuable items unattended, even for a few minutes.
- Be aware of your surroundings in public areas – keep your belongings close to you and make sure nobody is trying to take them.
- Secure your bag properly – don't make it easy for thieves to get into.
- Avoid leaving your items on display – this includes carrying your phone or wallet in your back pocket.
- Register your items at www.immobilise.com – you can also mark your belongings with a forensic marking kit.
- Install a tracking app – this could help you find lost or stolen property.
- Always back up your uni work so you can still access it if you do lose your laptop.



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Bike and vehicle security

Most bike and car crimes are committed by opportunistic thieves, so don't give them an easy target. Here are some tips:

Bikes

- Use a high-quality D-lock and lock the bike to a fixed, sturdy object, such as a bike rack.
- Lock it in a well-lit, visible area that's covered by CCTV. Use designated bike racks or secure bike storage facilities provided by your university.
- Register your bike at www.immobilise.com – you can also mark it with a forensic marking kit.
- Take removable parts with you – think seats, lights and other accessories that thieves may be tempted by.

Cars

- Close and lock all windows and doors – check your fob has done its job.
- Use a steering lock.
- Check to make sure you haven't left anything on display before you walk away.
- Ensure your car has an alarm, immobiliser and tracking system fitted.
- Park in well-lit areas that are covered by CCTV where possible.
- Never leave your keys in the ignition when leaving the car – even if it's just for a moment.



Safer nights out

Going out and socialising can be a big part of university life. It's important to take precautions though to help you have fun and stay safe when you're out and about:

- Stick together – go out in a group of people you trust. Stay together throughout the night and make sure everyone in your group is accounted for.
- You can also all share your location, so you know where to find each other.
- Look out for your mates – check in with each other throughout the night and don't leave anyone alone. This can be especially helpful if you're going to a new place or if you're not familiar with the area.
- Keep your phone charged – this will help you stay in touch with your friends and family, and will also allow you to call for help if you need it.
- Drink safely – never leave your drink unattended or accept drinks from strangers. Make sure you also drink plenty of water throughout the night.
- Know your limits – it's okay to have fun, but know when to stop. Being too drunk can make it difficult to get home safely.
- Trust your gut – if something doesn't feel right, leave the situation and report it to bar staff, security or the police.
- Ask for Angela – participating venues have trained staff to recognise the discreet code word, 'Angela'. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe while out, ask a staff member for Angela.
- Plan ahead – know how you're getting home after, and make sure you have enough money for a taxi or public transport.
- Check the time of the last train/bus/tram home to avoid being stranded late at night.
- Stay in public areas – stick to well-lit streets and avoid dark alleys or shortcuts.



Using taxis

Taxis are a great way to get around, especially after a night out. Here are some things to bear in mind though before jumping into one:

- Choose licensed taxis from reputable companies – look for official identification, logos and number plates to ensure you're getting into a legitimate and regulated taxi.
- Share your ride details with a friend or family member – let them know the name of the taxi company, the driver's name and your expected arrival time. You could also share your phone's location with them so they can track your journey.
- Verify the driver and vehicle – check that the driver's photo, name and number plates match the information provided by the taxi company. Also ensure that the vehicle matches the one specified during your booking.
- Trust your instincts – if something doesn't feel right about the driver or the taxi, trust your gut. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, don't hesitate to ask the driver to stop so you can get out at a safe location.
- Track your journey using GPS on your phone – this will give you a sense of direction and help you make sure the driver is taking the correct route.



Staying safe on public transport

Using public transport can be a convenient and efficient way to get around, but it's important to prioritise your safety. Here are some tips for staying safe when using the public transport network (which includes buses, trams, trains, stops and stations).

- Stay alert and be aware of your surroundings – especially when waiting at a bus/tram stop or railway station, or when you're in crowded areas.
- Plan your route – familiarise yourself with the routes and schedules in advance. Knowing where you're going can help you stay confident and avoid confusion. Always have a back-up plan in case your transport is delayed.
- Keep your luggage and other belongings with you at all times when travelling or waiting at a stop or station. If you need to store them in luggage compartments whilst on your journey, make sure to keep an eye on them, especially when people are getting on and off at stops or stations.
- Make sure your valuables are secure and kept out of sight where possible.
- Respect personal space of fellow passengers – avoid unnecessary physical contact and be mindful of others' comfort.
- Trust your instincts – if something feels off or makes you uncomfortable, move to a different area or seek assistance if needed. You should also report any crimes or suspicious activity.

To report crime, call **101** for non-emergencies or **999** in an emergency.

To report anti-social behaviour on your bus journey, text the words 'SeeSay' along with details of what's happened to **81018**.

To report non-emergency incidents on trains, text British Transport Police on **61016**.



Unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport

Experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment on public transport is a serious issue, and it's essential to know how to handle and report such incidents.

Sexual harassment is never okay and if it happens on a train or tram, you can report it to British Transport Police. If you are on a bus or at a stop, you should report it to West Midlands Police. You can report any type of sexual behaviour that has made you feel uncomfortable.

It takes courage to report sexual harassment and anything that has made you feel uncomfortable is worth reporting – you will always be taken seriously.

Ways to report unwanted sexual behaviour:

Train/tram

- Tell a member of staff
- Text **61016** on trains
- Call **0800 40 50 40**
- Ring **999** in an emergency
- Report online at **www.btp.police.uk**

You can also report crime and get more information on what to do if you see sexual harassment on trains or at stations, by downloading the Railway Guardian app for free.

Bus/stop

- Report online through the West Midlands Police website: **westmidlands.police.uk**
- Ring **101** for non-emergencies or **999** in an emergency



Online safety

Staying safe online is crucial in today's digital world. Here are some tips to help you navigate the online space securely and beat the fraudsters:

- Use a strong, unique password for your email account and make sure it's different to all your other online passwords.
- Create strong passwords using three random words – cyber criminals can easily guess weak, short passwords.
- Save passwords in your browser – letting your browser do this means you can use unique, strong passwords for all your important accounts.
- Turn on two-step verification – this will stop criminals from getting into your account, even if they know your password.
- Update your apps and device's software whenever prompted – these updates often include protection from viruses.
- Make sure to back up important data like photos, documents and other personal data.
- Report suspicious messages. If you've received an email or text that doesn't feel right, don't panic – you can forward suspicious texts to **7726** or suspicious emails to **report@phishing.gov.uk**. If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Report Fraud at **reportfraud.police.uk**.



- Check them out online, so you know who you're talking to – have a look at their social media accounts to see if they are who they say they are.
- Meet in a public space – avoid private or secluded areas and keep your belongings close to you.
- Make your own travel arrangements – use public transport or your own form of transportation. This keeps your address private, plus you'll have control over your own departure.
- Tell a friend or relative your plans and drop them a message to let them know how you're getting on – you could also share your location with them.
- Keep personal information private – be cautious about revealing sensitive information (such as your address, financial details or passwords) with someone you've just met.
- Trust your instincts – if you feel uncomfortable at any point, remove yourself from the situation.

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Consent

If you're planning to do anything sexual, everyone involved must voluntarily and enthusiastically give consent. Here are some things to remember:

- Make sure everyone involved is participating freely without coercion or manipulation.
- Communicate – don't assume someone wants to have sex with you. Be direct and talk openly about what you do and do not want to do.
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues – these can also indicate someone's comfort or discomfort.
- Ensure that everyone can actually give consent – somebody who has taken drugs, is too drunk to make decisions, is asleep or unconscious cannot give consent.
- Check in with yourself and others – do you feel comfortable with what's happening? If something doesn't feel right, safely remove yourself from the situation.
- Be respectful of someone's boundaries and don't push someone to do something they're not comfortable with.
- Stop immediately if someone withdraws their consent – consent can be withdrawn at any time.

Remember, sex without consent is rape.



Sextortion

Sextortion can refer to a variety of offences committed online. It is most often used to describe online blackmail, where criminals threaten to release sexual/indecent images of you, unless you pay money or do something else.

Anyone can be a victim of sextortion, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of this crime happening to you:

- Don't share intimate images online
- Be wary about who you are messaging and who you accept friend requests from
- Update privacy settings on your social media accounts so only people you know can look at your account
- Think twice about what you share online – can it be used against you in any way?

If you have been a victim of sextortion, remember it's not your fault and there is help and support available. Make sure to:

- Stop all communication with the offender immediately – make sure you don't send them any money
- Preserve evidence – take screenshots of the offender's profile information, and save messages and images
- Collect URLs and links to any of your images that have been shared online, if you can
- Report the incident to the police by calling **101**



Hate crime

Everyone has the right to live free from fear, intimidation and abuse. Nobody deserves to be abused or should have to accept intolerable behaviour.

A hate crime is a criminal offence that is motivated by hostility and prejudice towards somebody because of their transgender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, or religion or belief.

Hate crime can occur at home or in public spaces, such as the street, in public toilets, on public transport or in a library. It can also occur at university or in the workplace.

Hate crimes and incidents can include:

- Verbal abuse
- Physical abuse
- Online abuse
- Sexual assault
- Harassment
- Damage to property
- Bullying or threatening behaviour
- Inciting others to commit hate crimes

If you have experienced a hate crime or incident, we're here to support you. **Don't wait to report hate.**



PRIVATE
RESIDENTS
PARKING
ONLY



Knife crime

Life or knife? The choice is yours. Here are some things to remember if you're considering carrying a knife:

- It is illegal to carry a knife, unless you have a legitimate reason. Carrying a knife can mean four years in prison, even if you don't use it.
- It's also illegal to buy, sell or carry any type of banned knife.
- You don't have to only stab someone to be in trouble – under a law called 'joint enterprise' you could also end up in prison even if you didn't touch or use the weapon.
- By carrying a knife, you're more likely to get stabbed yourself.
- There is no 'safe place' to stab someone.

Here's what you can do to stay safe:

- Bin your knife to save a life – there are lots of knife surrender bins across the West Midlands for you to ditch knives anonymously.
- Report knife crime – you can contact West Midlands Police by calling **101 (999 in an emergency)** or through the live chat on our website.
- Get independent advice and report anonymously – you can do this using the charity service, **Fearless**.



Spiking

To spike a drink means to put alcohol/drugs into someone's drink without their knowledge or permission. It can also mean injecting someone with drugs without their consent. Spiking can happen to anyone, anywhere and can be carried out by strangers or people you know.

Everyone should feel safe to enjoy themselves without worrying about being spiked. However, there are steps you can take to help reduce the risk of spiking, whilst keeping yourself and others safe.

- Watch out for your friends and look after each other.
- Never leave your drink unattended.
- Be cautious if you are bought or given a drink – only accept drinks from people you know and trust.
- Be wary if people are reaching over your drinks.
- Alert staff immediately if you see anyone acting suspiciously around your or someone else's drink.

If you think you or a friend has been spiked, it's important to tell someone as soon as you can:

- Alert a member of staff or security if you're at a venue.
- Stay with your friend and keep talking to them. Seek medical support from staff or call an ambulance.
- Don't let them go home on their own or leave with someone you don't know.
- Report the incident to the police. In an emergency, call **999**.



Nitrous oxide

Nitrous oxide is no laughing matter. It's a colourless gas that's most commonly found in pressurised metal canisters. Remember these points if you're tempted to take some:

- It's illegal to give away or sell nitrous oxide canisters for human consumption. You could face seven years in prison if you do so.
- It's dangerous – drug driving is illegal. If caught, you could receive a heavy fine, prison sentence or even a driving ban.
- It's harmful - it can have serious implications to your health.



Support and reporting crime

Your University Officers

If you are ever worried about your safety, remember you are not alone. As well as university support services and the security team on campus, your university also has a dedicated West Midlands Police university officer.

These university officers work hard to keep you safe on campus. Information about your university's officer and their contact details can be found at saferstudents.co.uk.

Reporting a crime or incident

We appreciate it can be daunting talking to the police, but we are here to help you and keep you safe. If you witness a crime or are a victim yourself, it's very important to report it. This will help us give you the appropriate support, plus you will be helping the police tackle crime and make your local area safer.

For emergencies:

- Call **999**
- If you have a hearing or speech impairment and you've pre-registered with the emergencySMS service, you can use our textphone service **18000**

For non-emergencies:

- Call **101**
- If you have a hearing or speech impairment and you've pre-registered with the emergencySMS service, you can use our textphone service **18001 101**
- Message us through our live chat facility on our website: westmidlands.police.uk
- Report a range of incidents on our website



Keep updated

There are lots of ways you can keep up to date with what's going on in your community, as well as get helpful crime prevention advice.



Social media

 **@SaferStudents** follow our dedicated Instagram account to gain advice for staying safe at university. You can also follow West Midlands Police on a variety of platforms to get the latest updates.



Website

Visit our Safer Students website to gain more tips and advice on how to look after yourself at university and read first-hand experiences from students on a wide range of topics:

saferstudents.co.uk

You can also get a range of support and crime prevention advice on our West Midlands Police website: westmidlands.police.uk

WMNow

Sign up to WMNow for free and get live updates of what's going on where you live and study: wmnow.co.uk