



Communication:

Introduction

This module looks at how to design a sensible strategy for communications in your scheme, the problems caused by poor communication and how to overcome them.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- describe the four principles of good communication;
- use the four principles when you communicate with the police and in your Neighbourhood Watch.

This module is in two parts:

- Part one contains the Development Notes about good communications and how to use them.
- Part two contains the Session Notes and a video that can be used to discuss good communications in a group.



COMMUNICATION

Notes



Communication: Development Notes

Communication is the fuel which Neighbourhood Watch runs on. When communication stops Neighbourhood Watch comes to a grinding halt. These Development Notes look at how you can maintain proper contacts with the police and with the rest of your Neighbourhood Watch.

Like all fuel, to do its job properly communication requires certain ingredients. Let's look at four essential ingredients of communication.

It must be accurate

It must be conveyed at the appropriate time and by the right method

It must be passed to the right person(s)

There must be feedback



It must be accurate

The problems caused by inaccurate information could range from inconvenient to very serious. For example, you may pass on a message that a meeting starts at 8 o'clock. When people arrive at 8 o'clock and find that the meeting actually started at 7.30 they may be annoyed at the inconvenience. Hopefully it will soon be forgotten.

Take another example. You see a car on the driveway of a neighbour's house and take the number and description of the driver. It is later found that the house had been broken into. Your information could become evidence to put before a court.

The rule must be: "Don't include what you are not sure about." If, for instance, you were taking down the number of a car and you know it was ABC 123 but cannot remember the last letter. You may say, "I think it was an M or an N." It is far better to say you do not know the last letter rather than guess at it.

In particular, when it may become 'evidence' it is important to write down accurately what you have seen at the time or immediately after. Again, if you are not sure, don't write it down.



It must be conveyed at the right time and by the right method

Communication with the police

Some things are urgent, some are fairly urgent, and some are not urgent at all. Most of the problems with the way in which police respond to calls from the public arise because the 'urgent' channels get blocked up with calls that are not urgent. On the other hand, some urgent calls are sent by 'non-urgent' lines and that can cause just as many problems.

How do you decide what is and what is not urgent? How do you decide what means of communication to use? If people only knew some of the things the public use the 999 system for they would be shocked, if not a little amused. It is not unknown for someone to ring 999 to ask what time the local football match kicks off. On the other hand, one police station received a letter in Monday morning's post saying: "Please send the police - someone is breaking into the school across the road." The burglary had occurred (and the letter had been posted) on the Saturday morning! Despite the efficiency of our postal services, by the time the police had arrived on Monday morning the burglar had gone.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to list what is urgent and what is not urgent, because circumstances will be different in every case. However, as a guide the following may apply. The 999 system should only be used if the urgent and immediate attendance of the police or other emergency service is required.

If the problem is not urgent but does require some form of action, the ordinary number listed in the telephone directory should be used. For instance, you may want to know where a particular street is or report an item of lost or found property.



If the action expected is not required immediately, a letter, fax, or leaving a message on an answerphone may be enough. Examples may be that you wish to invite a police officer to attend a meeting or you may want to discuss something with the Crime Prevention Officer.

Using the correct channels allows the police to give a better response to problems. Neighbourhood Watch is an excellent means by which this can be achieved.

Communication within the scheme

Circulating information round the scheme may also be urgent or non-urgent. How you circulate information will depend on whether it is urgent or non-urgent.

Very urgent information may have to be quickly circulated by word of mouth.

Matters of lesser urgency may be circulated by telephone 'ring round' systems.

Non-urgent information could be circulated in a monthly bulletin.

The means by which you pass on information will depend on the nature and urgency of the message.



Getting the right message to the right person

The right person in the police

Because different police forces are structured in different ways, it would be impossible to describe how the force works in your particular area. If you ring your local police your call could be answered at the station in your town. On the other hand, it could be answered at the Force Headquarters many miles away. It does not really matter where it is answered as long as the message goes to the right person to carry out the action required.

It would be useful to your Neighbourhood Watch to know the structure of the force in your area, where your calls are received, and how they are dealt with.

The right person in Neighbourhood Watch

It is also important that information within your Neighbourhood Watch is dealt with properly. In other words, the information must be given the right level of urgency and circulated to the right people by the right means.

It is useful if you have a directory for your scheme, which gives contact numbers for the secretary, treasurer and other officers in the scheme, and a list of who needs to be told about each type of information.



Getting the feedback

How many times do you hear someone say: “I reported something but I don’t know what came of it.” It is important that people do know what happened to information they pass on, otherwise they may think it was just ignored. Apart from basic courtesy, feedback encourages people to report things again instead of thinking: “It was a waste of time last time so why bother this time.”

It is important that if you receive information from other members of your Neighbourhood Watch, you let them know the outcome of what they told you.

The next part of this module contains a short session on communications.



Communication:

Session Notes

About this session

This plan is for a short session on communications. It can be used as part of a Neighbourhood Watch meeting. The aim of the session is to help your scheme improve its communications with the police and within the scheme. By the end of this session the group will be able to:

- describe the route for communications within the local police area and within their Neighbourhood Watch;
- identify how urgent individual incidents and information are;
- record and communicate relevant information accurately and send it to the right person(s).

How long the session should last

Sixty minutes.

How many people should attend

Fourteen to 16 people.

The resources you will need

- a good sized comfortable room;
- something for each participant to write on;
- a video recorder and TV (the video is supplied with this module);
- handout (included with this module).



Session plan and time allocation

Introduction 0–10 minutes

Ask the group to talk about their experiences of communicating with the police or Neighbourhood Watch. Include the good and the bad experiences. Make the point that many of the problems are caused by the wrong channels of communication being used. This can lead to delay in the correct action being taken.

Four essential ingredients of communication 10–20 minutes

Use the handout and take the group through the ‘four essential ingredients’ of communication.

Local communications 20–30 minutes

The purpose of this section is to tell the group about the chain of communication in their police area and in their Neighbourhood Watch. How communications work in each area vary, but try to cover the following points.

Communication with the police

- What happens to a 999 call?
- What happens to non-urgent calls?
- Telephone numbers for:
 - the Neighbourhood Watch Officer
 - local police stations

Communications in Neighbourhood Watch

- Which communications are treated as urgent or non-urgent?
- Who deals with which type of communications?
- What methods of communicating does the scheme use?

If your Neighbourhood Watch is new, use this session to discuss how you want to set up communications in your scheme and what methods you will use.

**Video exercise 30–55 minutes**

Tell the group that you are going to show them a series of short clips of video. Between each clip there will be a break in the video. Participants can make notes about:

- the information they feel they ought to record about the incident;
- what they are going to do with the information.

After each clip discuss with the group what they would record and what they would do with the information.

Round off 55–60 minutes

Use the last five minutes to summarise what you have covered in the session. Look back to the beginning of these notes. In 'About this session' there were some objectives for the session. Check that you have achieved them.



The four principles of communication

It must be accurate

**It must be conveyed at the appropriate time and
by the right method**

It must be passed to the right person(s)

There must be feedback to the sender