

# OWATONNA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## *YOUR GUIDE TO NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY*



POLICE HEADQUARTERS

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***“EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS, THROUGH INNOVATIONS IN POLICING”***

## Mission Statement



## **CREATING SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS**

Neighborhood security encompasses a lot of different ideas and strategies. However, the unifying element is the need for neighbors to work both as individuals and as a coordinated team. In the following pages, you will find information on a variety of topics that can help to make your neighborhood safer and more inviting.

### **BROKEN WINDOW THEORY:**

'The Broken Window Theory' was made popular by the work of James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. The theory essentially maintains that there is a relationship between order/maintenance issues in geographic areas and the level of crime that occurs in the same area. They believe that if a neighborhood looks as though no one is caring for it, (i.e., there are abandoned cars, broken windows, people panhandling), then it becomes a magnet for increasing levels of anti-social behavior. The theory suggests that as the order/maintenance problems increase, law-abiding individuals become more fearful and retreat from the area. The fewer law-abiding people involved in the area, the more attractive it becomes to those inclined toward criminal behavior. Soon the balance of that area tips to favor the criminal element rather than law abiding citizens.

Neighborhoods that are cohesive and respond quickly to small changes in their environment have a reduced risk of larger crime problems developing. Some strategies that have been used successfully are:

- Prompt removal of abandoned vehicles.
- Fast clean up of illegally dumper items, litter and spilled garbage.
- Immediate paint out of graffiti (within 48 hours).
- Providing gathering spots for teens to gather so they don't "hang out" on the corner.
- Fresh paint on buildings.
- Keeping sidewalks and gutters clean.
- Continual maintenance of vacant properties.

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## **CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (CPTED)**

The physical design of your neighborhood, it's layout, lighting, building and maintenance, can effect the levels of crime and fear in your neighborhood. The "Broken Windows" theory, discussed on page 4, describes how a quick response to the small problems of broken windows, graffiti, trash, etc., can stop the escalation toward bigger crime problems occurring. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or CPTED, takes this one step further. CPTED looks at the entire neighborhood to identify areas or elements that may have the potential to attract crime. Knowing simple CPTED design principals can lead to solutions that can be undertaken to reduce fear and prevent crime in these areas. CPTED can also help you plan ahead for future development in your neighborhood.

There is much information about CPTED available online if you want more details than this booklet can provide. There are some basic strategies, however, that you can incorporate into discussions with your neighborhood for shared areas such as parks or alleys. There are also strategies you should consider for your personal property.

### **NATURAL SURVEILLANCE:**

CPTED does not promote the "fortressing" of properties; quite the contrary. The ability to see what is going on in and around a property should be your first priority.

Perpetrators of crime are attracted to areas and residences with low visibility. This can be counteracted in the following ways:

- Lighting – Street lights should be well spaced and in working order, alleys and parking areas should also be lit. Lighting should also reflect the intended hours of operations, i.e., lighting of playfields or structures in local parks may actually encourage after hour criminal activities. Motion-sensing lights perform the double duty of providing light when needed and letting trespassers know that "they have been seen."
- Landscaping – Generally, uniformly shaped sites are safer than irregularly shaped sites because there are less hiding places. Plants should follow the 3-8 rule of

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thumb; hedges no higher than 3 feet and tree canopies starting no lower than 8 feet. This is especially important around entryways and windows.

- Fencing – Fences should allow people to see in. Even if the fences are built for privacy, they should be of a design that is not too tall and has some visibility.
- Windows – Windows that look out on streets and alleys are good natural surveillance, especially bay windows. These should not be blocked. Retirees, stay at home parents, and people working from home offices can provide good surveillance for the neighborhood during the day.

### **NATURAL ACCESS CONTROL:**

Access Control refers to homes, businesses, parks and other public areas having distinct and legitimate points for entry and exits. However, this should also be balanced to avoid “user entrapment,” or not allowing for easy escape or police response to the area. Generally, crime perpetrators will avoid areas that only allow them with one way to enter and exit, and that have high visibility and/or have a high volume of user traffic.

This can be assured by:

- Park designs with open, uninhibited access and a defined entry point. A good example is a park with transparent fencing around the perimeter, and one large opening in the gate for entry. Putting vendors or shared public facilities near this entrance creates more traffic and more surveillance.
- Businesses with one legitimate entrance. Avoid recessed doorways.
- A natural inclination is to place public restrooms away from centers of activity, but they can become dangerous if placed in an uninhabited area. Restrooms that are down a long hallway, or foyer entrances with closed doors, are far away from the entrance of a park, or are not visible from the roadway can become problem areas.
- Personal residences with front and back doors that are clearly visible and well lit.

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### **TERRITORIALITY/DEFENSIBLE SPACE:**

Much like the “Broken Window” theory advocates; the quick attending to nuisance crimes to show that a neighborhood is valued, territoriality means showing that your community “owns” your neighborhood. While this includes removing graffiti and keeping buildings and yards maintained, it also refers to small personal touches. Creating flower gardens or boxes, putting out seasonal decorations, or maintaining the plants in traffic circles seems simple, but sends a clear message that people in your neighborhood care and won’t tolerate crime in their area. These kinds of efforts can also be undertaken for more dramatic changes. These are some things that should be considered when planning for future growth:

- Front porches and apartment balconies add to street surveillance.
- Traffic plans that consider the size of the neighborhood. People that drive by “feel” more than speed limits, so a wide, two lane residential street can lead to speeding. Traffic circles, or increasing the size of curbs can help to calm traffic.
- Institutional architecture that respects the neighborhood identity and does not dwarf the current scale of the neighborhood.
- Clear transitions between private, semi-private, and public areas.

### **THERE IS POWER IN NEIGHBORS**

If your neighborhood is having chronic problems with nuisances such as noise and speeding, or more serious problems with drug or gang activities, you are not powerless to change the situation. The immediate role of the police is to respond to individual situations, but when a situation is part of a recurring problem; the help of active neighbors help investigators and allow police to take further action.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

- Report Crime – Don’t assume that your neighbors have already reported the crime or that the police already know. Report criminal or suspicious activity each and every time it occurs. If the pattern changes, report that change. All neighbors affected by the drug activity are encouraged to report it.

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- Keep a Log – Keeping records of where, when, and what kind of activity occurred will help later if there is a criminal prosecution or need to establish a pattern of behavior. A log should be kept of behaviors that are suspicious in addition to those that are criminal. A log should include:
  - An address of where the activity occurred.
  - Date and time of the activity.
  - Description of the problem: people, vehicles, and activities.
  - Describe both what you see and hear.
  - Incident or event numbers: if you report activity to 911, ask for an event number. If an officer comes out to take a report, ask for an incident number. Keep both of these numbers in your log.
  - The actions that have been taken by you or your neighbors. Take note of your responses to each activity. Note how the activities have directly affected your life: how do you feel emotionally in response to the activity? Have there been significant lifestyle changes you or your neighbors have made due to the activity?

### **RECOGNIZING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES**

One of the cornerstones of a safe neighborhood is reporting suspicious activity to police. Pinpointing what precisely constitutes ‘suspicious’ behavior can be difficult, so it is important to distinguish between true illegal activity and activities of people who just live their lives differently than yours. The following are guidelines of what can be considered suspicious behavior:

#### **SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY INVOLVING LOCATIONS:**

- Continuous “Repair” operations at a non-business location.
- Open or broken windows at closed businesses or residences whose owners are temporarily absent.
- Unusual noises such as gunshots, screaming, unusually barking dogs, or any noise that is suggestive of foul play.

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- Unusual odors coming from the location.
- Continuous traffic that comes and goes to the same location, usually staying for very short periods of time.

### **SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS INVOLVING PROPERTY:**

- Property carried by persons on foot, especially questionable if the person is running. May be significant if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.
- Property being removed from or being placed into vehicles or buildings if removed from closed residences whose owners are known to be absent.
- Someone offering to sell you something for significantly less than the market value.
- Items that accumulate in private garages, storage areas, or on property especially if the items are in good condition but not in use.

### **SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS INVOLVING PEOPLE:**

- People going door-to-door in a residential area and one or more of the subjects going into a back or side yard. More suspicious if another person remains in the front of the house when this occurs.
- Someone waiting in front of a house or business when the owners are absent, or if the business is closed.
- Someone forcing entrance to or tampering with a residence, business, vehicle, etc.
- A person running especially if something of value is being carried.

### **SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS INVOLVING VEHICLES:**

- Slow moving vehicles, vehicles without lights, and/or the course followed appears aimless or repetitive. This is suspicious in any location, but particularly in areas of schools, parks, or playgrounds.
- Vehicles being loaded with valuables are suspicious if parked in front of a closed business or untended residence, even if the vehicle is a legitimate looking

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commercial unit – possibly even bearing a sign identifying it as a repair vehicle, moving van, etc.

- Abandoned vehicles.
- Persons attempting forcibly to enter a locked vehicle, especially at night or in a parking lot.
- Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from a vehicle especially at night or in a parking lot.
- Apparent business transactions conducted from a vehicle especially if around schools or parks, and if juveniles are involved.
- Persons being forced into vehicles, especially if juveniles or females.
- Objects thrown from a vehicle, especially while traveling at a high speed.

### **RECOGNIZING DRUG ACTIVITY**

#### **SIGNS OF DRUG ACTIVITY:**

Like all cities, Owatonna faces a growing battle against drugs. The police can't solve this problem alone; success requires community involvement. It is often hard to be certain that what you are seeing involves drugs, but some patterns may indicate drug activity:

- An unusually large amount of traffic coming to a building – in cars, taxis or walking – often at strange hours. Visitors may sometimes pound on doors or shout to be let in. This traffic is usually quick, with people staying only a short time. Sometimes they don't go in at all; instead, someone comes out to meet them.
- Finding drugs or drug paraphernalia (syringes, pipes, etc.) in the area.
- Repeated, observable exchange of items, especially where money is visible.
- Offers to sell you drugs or conversation about drugs that you overhear.
- Noxious odors from, or around, the building, such as "musty" smells.
- Buildings where extreme security measures seem to be being taken.
- Buildings where no owner or primary renter is apparent, and no home activities, such as yard work, painting, or maintenance, seems to be going on.

### **RECOGNIZING GANG ACTIVITY**

Gang activity is a common concern for many neighborhoods. Understanding more about gangs and their activity will help address some of the root causes. First is understanding why young people are attracted to gangs. The most prevalent reason for joining gangs is the promise of wealth or recognition. Other strong motivations for joining a gang are the excitement of gang activity, peer pressure, attention, protection from other gangs or hostile individuals, a lack of realization of the hazards involved, and family tradition. Many gang members are seeking the recognition and acceptance that they do not receive at home or in school.

### **HOW ARE GANGS IDENTIFIED?**

Most gang members are proud of their gang affiliation and freely admit membership. They use and display signs of their affiliation openly.

- **Gang Names** – Gangs usually adopt a group name that relates to their neighborhood, street, or region.
- **Nickname** – Most gang members adopt a nickname or “street name”. The name usually fits the physical characteristics or personality of the individual.
- **Dress** – Members wear gang symbols on clothing; use the emblem of a sports team; a certain brand or color of clothing and accessories; or wear clothing in a particular manner to indicate gang membership.
- **Graffiti** – Gang members use graffiti to mark their gang’s “turf” or territory, to advertise the gang’s status or power, and to declare their allegiance to the gang.

### **REPORTING DRUG/GANG ACTIVITY**

#### **Drug or Gang Activity in Progress:**

For drug activity that is in progress that needs an immediate police response, call 9-1-1. If you would like to speak to the responding officer about the situation, inform the 9-1-1 call taker of that request.

#### **On-going Drug or Gang Activity:**

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To report on-going drug or gang activity, which police need to be aware of, but doesn't require immediate response; call the police non-emergency number (507)-451-8232. You may want to consider keeping a log of activities, as detailed on page 8.

Note: You can report drug or gang activity anonymously, but it is more helpful if you give your name and phone number in case additional information is needed. You can ask that your name not be released to anyone.

### **GRAFFITI**

Graffiti is vandalism. Graffiti is created to be seen by others, so the best thing you can do if it appears on your property is to paint it out thoroughly and immediately. The best way to remove graffiti is to paint the entire wall (or up to seven feet high), making a straight line across the top with a color that matches the wall. This leaves no trace of graffiti and does not draw the attention of the vandals. If that is not possible, use a closely matched color blocked over the graffiti in neat, square shapes. To report graffiti on public property call the Owatonna Police non-emergency number at (507)-451-8232.

### **STREET LIGHTING**

Street lighting, combined with other types of neighborhood lighting, can make a big difference in how safe a neighborhood feels. If streetlights in your neighborhood need repair, please contact the Owatonna Street Department at (507)-444-4350.

### **SPEEDING**

Speeding automobiles are one of Owatonna residents' most commonly cited concerns. In residential neighborhoods, fast moving traffic can be noisy, endanger pedestrians and playing children, and can be very unpleasant for residents. Fortunately there are several techniques the Owatonna Police Department utilizes to assist residents with speeding problems so that the solution can fit the neighborhood.

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### **SET A GOOD EXAMPLE:**

The first step you can take to help end speeding and traffic problems is to drive the way you would like others to drive in your neighborhood. By driving carefully and at proper speeds, you can make sure that you are not part of the problem, and set a good example. Your driving helps demonstrate to others what is and is not acceptable in your neighborhood.

### **SAFEGUARDING YOUR RESIDENCE**

Working together with your neighbors and applying CPTED principles of maintenance and lighting will heighten the security of your neighborhood and your home. There are also some additional security measures you can implement to protect your home from burglary and theft:

### **GENERAL HOME SECURITY PRECAUTIONS:**

The first thing you should ask yourself about your home is, “If I am locked out of my house, where could I get in without too much difficulty?” This should lead you to see potential problems with your current security. Please remember though, that while you do want to make it hard for a burglar to get in, you don’t want it to be impossible for your household to get out in an emergency.

- **Exterior doors** – should be strong enough to withstand excessive force, be secured with a deadbolt lock that has a minimum one-inch throw, and all strike plates and frames should be anchored to the home’s main construction. Frames should be anchored to the homes main construction. Frames should be free of warping, cracks, and in good repair.
- **Peepholes** – should be on the main entrance door and should have a doorwide-angle (180 degree) view.
- **Sliding glass doors** – and windows should be secure against forcing the locks or from being lifted completely out of the frame.
- **High-risk windows** – basement, garage, and ground level windows are important to remember and secure.

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- **Double-hung windows** – should be secured with pins or extra locks to discourage prying.
- **House numbers** – should be posted on your house and be clearly visible from the street both night and day.

### LEAVING FOR VACATION:

If you leave obvious signs that your house is unoccupied while you are on vacation, it can be an invitation for burglars. The Owatonna Police Department will perform house checks for you while on vacation. To request a house check, contact the Owatonna Police Department at (507) 451-8232. Also, while you are gone, your neighbors are a great resource to watch your house. A trusted neighbor should be:

- Informed of your vacation plans; when you are leaving and your expected return date.
- Left with a key to your home so that the position of curtains, and/or blinds can be changed.
- Asked to pick up the newspapers, mail, and to place it in the house.
- Inform neighbors on all four sides of when you'll be gone so that a complete look-out is maintained. Be selective, however, in announcing your plans to anyone else.
- It is a good idea to ask a neighbor to park a car in your driveway and to use your garbage container.