



## Safety Planning and Emergency Preparedness for Refugee Housing

Safety planning and emergency preparedness are crucial aspects to consider when resettling a refugee family in the United States. Refugees may face specific challenges as they adapt to a new environment, and understanding safety planning strategies can help them stay protected and confident in their new community. It is important to remember that each refugee family may have varying circumstances and needs. Therefore, flexibility and empathy are essential when providing housing and support to newcomers.

### Pre-Arrival Preparation

Before a newcomer family arrives in the United States, case managers and housing coordinators should familiarize themselves with the neighborhoods in their areas. When conducting research, case managers should focus on the following criteria:

- **Previously Settled Communities:** When searching for housing for a newcomer family, case managers should consider prioritizing housing in areas close to other groups of

resettled newcomers, particularly newcomers of the same culture, religion, or nationality. Not only will these areas generally have helpful local resources for newcomers—such as houses of worship, public transportation, and international grocery stores—but they will likely be more familiar with and accepting of diversity and the newcomer journey. However, note that some clients may, for various reasons, prefer not to be housed in close proximity to others of the same nationality. If this is the case, hear their concerns,

particularly those relating to safety or discrimination, and move forward accordingly.

- **Local Crime Rates:** Though it is not always easy to talk about, it is important for resettlement staff to be informed about local crime rates. [This resource](#) provides an instant assessment of crime risk in any neighborhood in the United States. It is best practice for case managers to use these crime statistics in combination with their knowledge of the area and intuition regarding its safety to weigh a neighborhood's suitability for a newcomer family.
- **National Sex Offender Registry:** When searching for neighborhoods suitable for newcomers, case managers must also be aware of safety related to sexual abuse and assault. Consult the [United States Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website](#) to identify risk in your locality. Though the presence of perpetrators of sexual abuse/assault is not a reason to reject housing, it is something to be aware of, especially if the newcomer family includes women and children.

Once case managers have researched potential neighborhoods for resettlement—also taking into account income level and proximity to public transportation, schools, health care facilities, grocery stores, and other necessary resources for newcomers—they can begin the housing search with more clarity on which neighborhoods to consider and how to prepare the newcomer family to be safe and secure in their new neighborhood.

## Orientation

During orientation, it is important to communicate safety planning and emergency preparedness with newcomer families. It is crucial to make families aware of local laws and law enforcement while also educating them on crime prevention, personal safety techniques, and common scams. Proactive, trauma-informed education on these subjects, done mindfully and with care to not instill undue fear, can help reduce the chances that a newcomer family will fall victim to crimes and can give them tools to react appropriately if unsafe situations do occur.

## Understanding Local Laws and Law Enforcement

To help acclimate families to their new community, provide an overview of the legal system, being sure to explain that police in the United States are an entity that newcomers can lean on for help in emergencies (as this may not have been the case in their country of origin). In addition, provide information on how and when to contact local law enforcement and emergency response teams, including fire departments and medical response teams. Defining what is and is not a medical emergency is critical, especially for newcomers who are unfamiliar with the U.S. health care system. Sharing emergency phone numbers is also crucial to ensure timely responses during emergencies. To prepare newcomers, case managers can reference these [materials on safety](#), which are offered in a variety of languages.

### Crime Prevention Awareness and Personal

**Safety Tips:** Encouraging families to practice personal safety helps reduce the risk of crimes. Families can be more alert and aware by locking their doors and windows, not opening the door for strangers, keeping their personal information secure, keeping their home well-lit at night, drawing the curtains and blinds at night, traveling in pairs or groups, and traveling in well-lit places during evening hours. More personal safety tips for crime prevention can be found [here](#).

**Fraud Prevention:** When helping a family acclimate, it is important to educate them about fraud and scams, in particular those that commonly target newcomers. Advise them to be cautious when sharing personal information and to verify the legitimacy of any unfamiliar requests or offers. Switchboard has a [guide](#) on reporting scams and fraud, and information on avoiding scams in the housing search can be found [here](#).

Many local municipalities have tipsheets or one-pagers, sometimes translated, for locals to use to learn about community-specific safety tips. For more information, you can search your local government website or reach out to your local fire department or police station via their non-emergency lines.

## Move In

### Evaluating the Home

Prior to moving in, and again on move-in day, case managers and the newcomer family must evaluate the home—as well as the surrounding neighborhood—for safety and security measures. Case managers should explain each step of the evaluation process to the newcomer family to equip them with all the necessary safety and security information.

**Consider printing [this checklist](#) and using it during the walkthrough.** Take extra care when inspecting the unit with the newcomer family for the following **safety measures**:

- Working smoke detectors in or near each bedroom, by the front door, and near the kitchen
- Working fire extinguishers
- Working carbon monoxide (CO)/radon detectors. (Some states require these detectors, while in other states tenants must supply their own. Check your [state's regulations](#).)
- Hallways/common areas have fire safety features (alarms, sprinklers, etc.) if the unit is located within a building complex
- Identified emergency escape route(s)


Also inspect the unit for **security measures** and explain their functions to the newcomer family:

- All doors and windows should be secure. Demonstrate how to lock and unlock all doors and windows.
- If the unit contains a security system, be sure the newcomer family understands exactly how it works. If the unit does not have a security system, provide information on affordable options, such as installing security cameras or alarms.
- Share contact information for local law enforcement and emergency services. Create a “refrigerator list” for the newcomer family with the following emergency phone numbers and when to call each one.

### Essential Numbers and Resources

**911:** Individuals should call 911 in the case of an [emergency](#), including crime; fires; medical emergencies; home and business intruders;

vehicle crashes involving personal injury, major property damage, or traffic tie-ups; and sighting of a criminal who is wanted by the police. When calling 911, individuals should be prepared to share the following information: **current location, phone number you are calling from, and description of the situation.** So, be sure to include the newcomers' unit address and their U.S. phone number on the refrigerator list as well.



**911 call takers have immediate access to a language interpretation service with over 100 languages and dialects. If needed, newcomers should know how to say in English that they need interpretation.**

**211:** Newcomers should be aware of [211](#) to get connected to community resource specialists in their area. Dialing 211—or a local variation of that number, which you can find [here](#)—will connect you to local organizations that provide critical services, such as meeting basic food, transportation, housing, and health care needs.

**Housing Provider's Phone Number:** Newcomers should have access to their housing provider in case of an emergency or for maintenance requests. This could be the landlord's direct number or the community's general number.

**Emergency Contact Information:** The name and number of the family's U.S.-based emergency contact person(s) should be included on the list. Often when a family first moves in, they request to list the case manager as the emergency contact. However, ideally, the contact would be a trusted family member or friend.

**Closest Hospital:** The name and address of the closest hospital/emergency room in case clients

need to seek emergency care for situations that do not require an ambulance.

**Other Contacts:** Over time, this list should grow to include the contact information for the family's primary care provider, the children's pediatrician, and any schools or daycare the children attend.

### Cultural Sensitivity in Crime Reporting

Remember to approach crime awareness and prevention with sensitivity to the refugee family's cultural background and past experiences. Reinforce the idea that, despite challenges, the United States offers resources and support to ensure their safety and successful integration into society, including language resources. Encourage families to contact their housing coordinator or community organizations if they have questions or concerns regarding safety.

### Childproofing

**If the newcomer family includes young children, assist the family in taking the following childproofing measures:**

- Use outlet covers on all electrical outlets within reach of children
- Secure TVs, dressers, bookcases, and any other heavy furniture to the wall with mounted hardware or safety straps
- Use cabinet locks on any bathroom and kitchen cabinets within reach of children, as these often contain harsh cleaning chemicals, medication, or other objects unsafe for little ones
- In the kitchen, use knob covers to prevent children from turning on the oven and stove
- Cover the pointy edges of coffee tables or other furniture with padding

- Store detergents out of reach, and urge newcomers with young kids to avoid purchasing liquid laundry gel packs, as children can mistake them for candy
- If the unit includes front-loading washers and dryers, use child locks on both machines

### Emergency Preparedness

**Upon move-in, help the newcomer family create emergency plans in the event of fire or evacuation.** If the newcomer family includes individuals with disabilities or elderly people, be sure to [tailor each emergency response plan to accommodate their needs](#).

- **Fire Escape Plan:** [This resource](#) walks individuals through creating and practicing a home fire escape plan, which ensures that everyone in the home knows what to do in case of a fire.
- **Evacuation Plan:** Depending on your location in the United States, natural disasters or other emergency evacuations may be possible. Planning is crucial to make sure that the newcomer family can evacuate quickly and safely. Consult [this resource](#) to help newcomers outline what to do before, during, and after an evacuation. Newcomers should also have access to the [FEMA app](#) for a list of open shelters during an active disaster and should be aware of local evacuation routes.
- **Building a "Go Kit":** In the event of an evacuation due to an emergency, individuals and families may need to survive on their own food, water, and other supplies for several days, without shelter. Discuss this [emergency supply kit list](#) with the newcomer family, and consider helping them set up their own personal "go kits."

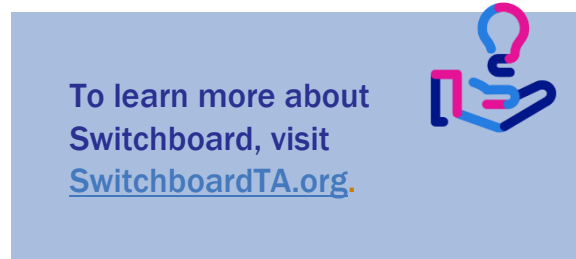
### Supporting Safe Housing Outcomes Through Community Engagement

Community integration—knowing and being known by neighbors and those around you—contributes to feelings of safety and security. Particularly for newcomers in the U.S., engaging with neighborhood, school, or religious communities secures a network of people to connect with. These people, whether U.S. nationals or newcomers themselves, may offer support, advice,

and help in a moment of need. Here are some ways case managers can encourage community engagement to support safe housing outcomes:

- **Assist Newcomers in Connecting with their Neighbors:** Case managers should take the time to introduce clients to their next-door neighbors. If there is a language barrier, case managers can, **with the family's permission**, take a moment to explain on a basic level the newcomer family's situation, why they have resettled in the United States, and their [refugee status](#).
- **Encourage Newcomers to Join Groups:** Life is more fulfilling—and much safer—when individuals are part of a community. If newcomers are religious, consider connecting them to a relevant house of worship or religious meeting place near their new home. For all newcomer clients, offer assistance connecting with local volunteer groups, sports leagues, or activities at community centers to support their successful integration into their new communities.

[Nextdoor](#): This online community offers a space for local neighborhoods to come together to exchange ideas and information.

A blue rectangular graphic containing text and an icon. The text reads: "To learn more about Switchboard, visit [SwitchboardTA.org](http://SwitchboardTA.org)." To the right of the text is a stylized icon of a hand holding a lightbulb, with a blue outline and a pink-to-purple gradient fill.

To learn more about  
Switchboard, visit  
[SwitchboardTA.org](http://SwitchboardTA.org).

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## Resources

[Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety](#): This evidence summary from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) explores the relationship between housing and public safety.

[Settle In](#) is available in 12 languages and includes multilingual multimedia resources for newcomers and direct service providers. Topics related to safety and protection include [Rights & Responsibilities](#), [Avoiding Fraud](#), and [Safe Spaces](#).

[Crime Stoppers USA](#): This resource allows you to submit an anonymous crime tip online or by phone.

[SAFEGROWTH®](#): This organization focuses on action-based practices to improve neighborhood safety and livability.

[National Neighborhood Watch](#): This website allows people to find or start their own neighborhood watch in their community.

