ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Personal Safety at university

Introduction

Most students come to University with the expectation that they will leave having gained a degree or higher level of qualification which will help them achieve well in the world of work.

In addition, it is likely that you hope to meet new friends and/or a partner, have a great social life and enjoy the opportunity to connect with a wide range of people and experiences that will stay with you for a long time to come.

To help you think about your own personal and sexual safety whilst at University we have put together some helpful suggestions and facts that will enable you to take steps to protect your safety and that of others around you.

Myths and Facts

- **Myth:** Most people are assaulted by strangers in dark alleyways.
  - **Fact:** It is true that some personal and sexual assaults are committed by strangers and that care should always be taken when walking home through dark areas. However, by far the majority of sexual assault crimes (90%) are committed by someone the victim knows, either very well or someone they met recently.

- **Myth:** Only a certain type of person is vulnerable to assault.
  - **Fact:** Everyone needs to be aware and take steps to think about their own personal safety since there is no certainty about who may become vulnerable to an assault or not. Male students as well as female students should consider safety tips when out socialising.

- **Myth:** The woman/man was drunk or had been using drugs; this must mean they were up for having sex even if they didn’t say so.
  - **Fact:** A person who is either unconscious or who has their judgement severely impaired through the use of drugs and alcohol is, according to the law, unable to give consent. Having sex with someone who has not been able to give informed consent is against the law.

- **Myth:** The majority of women who report sexual assaults have made it up.
  - **Fact:** Although, like with any other type of crime, a very small percentage of reported rapes/sexual assaults are made up the majority are true. If a friend tells you about something that has happened to them it is more likely to be true than not true.

- **Myth:** A sexual assault is always violent.
  - **Fact:** Sometimes people use aggressive verbal and physical persuasion which stops short of violence in order to force sex on someone else. A healthy sexual relationship or experience should always be agreed by both parties and not involve verbal or physical coercion. [Watch this video.](#)

Safe Socialising

Socialising whilst at University is a great way to balance out the stress of studying and there are several on-campus bars and societies in addition to many local bars and activities in the wider Reading area.

The University takes your safety and security very seriously and so within the campus environment there are security cameras for your protection and Wardens you can talk to about any safety concerns you may have related to accommodation within Halls.

- Many students can feel pressured into going out drinking with new friends in order to “fit in”. If you feel unsure about going out drinking with a particular person or group, it may be better to wait until you have got to know
them a bit better before accepting the invitation. Not all of the students at University want to go out drinking so there will be other opportunities for socialising that you can try.

- Know your alcohol limits. If you have not had much experience of drinking and alcohol prior to coming to university you may not yet have learnt about your individual alcohol tolerance level. This can be different for each person so you may find that you have a different tolerance level to your friends.
- When you are out, keep an eye on your drink and ask someone you trust to watch it if you are going to leave it for example to get up and dance or go to the toilet. It’s best not to accept drinks bought for you by people you don’t know and trust unless you are completely sure that nothing has been added to it.
- Drinks can be spiked with drugs, such as Ketamine, Rohypnol or GHB, or additional alcohol such as spirits. Soft drinks as well as alcoholic drinks can be spiked. If your drink tastes different or unusual in any way either throw it away or use a testing stick (available online) to check your drink. Remember that this applies to male students as well as female.
- Plan your evening before you set out to ensure that you are going to be able to get home with friends rather than on your own.
- If you notice that you are feeling drunk much quicker than would be expected or you feel muscle weakness in your arms and legs, let one of your friends know so that they can look after you. Make your way to a safe place and ask your friend to stay with you until you feel better.
- You may also notice changes in your friends’ behaviour. If you become concerned about your own or somebody else’s wellbeing call University Security services or in a medical emergency the Ambulance service.

Identifying Risky Situations – What can you do?

Scenario 1:

Let’s imagine the following situation: Y

- You have been out with a large group of friends and their friends for the evening and people are starting to drift away from the group and go home or elsewhere.
- You find yourself in a smaller group of a few people, none of whom you know really well as your best friend has now gone home with his/her partner.
- One of the members of the group suggests you go back with them to their room as they have some more drinks there and offer to share these with you.
- You feel flattered that they have invited you back but also a bit anxious as you had not met this person until this evening and so know nothing about them.
- You think it would be safer to say, “No thanks” but their insistence increases the more you seem hesitant.
- What will you do?

Passive response: “Well ok, yes”

Assertive response: “Thanks for asking me but I’m going to say no as I have things to do tomorrow and am going home now”.

Aggressive response: “Why would I want to do that?”

Scenario 2:

Let’s consider the following:

- You have been out for the evening to visit a friend and need to make your way home now. Another friend is going to walk with you most of the way home as their room is in the same direction.
- You leave together and walk towards home and get to the point where you both take a different route. It’s only a few minutes from here to your house so you feel it should be fine.
As you walk back you notice that someone is now walking behind you and getting nearer to you. Something about the way their speed is increasing alarms you, what will you do?

**Passive response: **Slow down to let them pass

**Assertive response:** Take your phone out and call a friend, maybe the friend you just parted company with.

**Aggressive response:** Turn around and confront the person asking, “What are you following me for?”

In both of the above scenarios you will be better off by taking the more assertive approach.

This isn’t always easy to do but if you give it a try in ordinary everyday situations you will find you can do this more easily in risky situations.

There are also precautions you can take to keep yourself safer:

- Make sure your phone is always with you and charged up before going out.
- Stick to pathways around campus that are lit and if possible the ones with security cameras.
- Watch out for your friends and where they are during the evening. This is particularly important at the end of the evening when people tend to drift off.
- Use the university night bus to get home from the library when studying late at night.
- Don’t be afraid to inform a security guard or Hall Warden if you think there is something unsafe about someone’s behaviour. Better to have said something than to wish you had at a later date. “Don’t be a bystander!”

**The University’s security number is:** 0118 378 6300.