Neighbourhood Watch
Let's watch out for each other

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From neighbours to community

A practical guide to building lasting connection, belonging and a neighbourhood people are proud to call home - from day one and forever.



A new home is just the beginning

Moving into a new estate is one of life's biggest moments. The house is ready — but the community isn't built yet. That's not a problem. It's an opportunity.

The most vibrant, resilient and genuinely happy neighbourhoods are built intentionally, one connection at a time. Research consistently shows that people who know their neighbours feel safer, happier and more satisfied with where they live. They look out for each other. They celebrate together. They notice when something isn't right — and they do something about it.

This guide is for you — whether you moved in last week or have lived on your street for years. It's for new residents building their first friendships, local residents and volunteers who bring people together, and local groups who sustain that energy for the long haul.

Connection is its own reward — and it turns out, connected communities are also the safest ones. This is a guide about friendship, belonging, and the remarkable things that happen when people simply know each other.

3×

People who know their neighbours are three times more likely to feel safe in their area.

(Rollwagan 2014. Aviva 2019)

68%

Of Australians say a sense of community is important when choosing where to live.

(Living in Australia, 2024)



Building connection: your first days to forever

This timeline is for you — not the estate. New residents arrive every month for years, and that's the beauty of it. Wherever you are in your journey, there's always a next step. Start here, at your own pace, from the day you move in.

Don't worry if your neighbours have lived here longer than you — or if you've lived here for years and are only reading this now. Community building has no expiry date. The best time to start is always today.

Month 1 - 3 First hellos

The earliest weeks are magic — you're new, you're curious, and so is everyone else on your street. This is the easiest time to make a first move. A knock on the door or a wave over the fence can become a friendship that lasts decades. Don't wait for someone else to go first.

- Knock on three doors
- Introduce yourself at the letterbox
- Share your number with next-door
- Find the dog owners

Month 3 - 12 Building the habit

Community needs rhythm. Regular, low-pressure events create the routine that turns strangers into acquaintances — and acquaintances into friends. It doesn't have to be grand. A shared BBQ or a kids' bike ride around the streets works perfectly.

- Monthly street catch-up
- Skill and tool sharing group
- Connect with your local NHW group
- Plant a community garden

Year 1 - 3 Finding your identity

By now your street or estate has stories, nicknames and shared memories. You know who's good with tools, who makes the best pavlova, and who to call if something feels off. This is community. Formalise the structures that help it grow.

- Elect a street coordinator
- Annual street party
- Contact NHW Victoria about establishing a local group
- Welcome newcomers formally

Year 3+ forever A neighbourhood that takes care of itself

The best communities are self-sustaining. New residents are welcomed automatically. Local traditions carry on. People feel genuine ownership and pride. And when life gets hard for someone, the community is already there.

- Mentor new residents
- Community leadership roles
- Link with local council
- Stories and traditions

The strength of a neighbourhood isn't measured by its fences. It's measured by the number of people who would notice if you didn't come home.

~ NHW Victoria

12 ways to bring your neighbourhood together

You don't need a committee or a budget. The best community moments are often the simplest. Here are ideas for every season, every age group and every comfort level. Start with one. See what happens.

Street breakfast



Pick a Saturday. Set up a table in a driveway. Coffee and toast. You'll be amazed who turns up.

Vegie swap box



A box where neighbours leave surplus produce and take what they need. Zucchini season has never been so social.

Kids' chalk day



Close the cul-de-sac on a Sunday. Let the kids paint the road. Parents end up chatting for hours.

Footpath library



A weatherproof box: take a book, leave a book. More than books — a daily reason to stop and talk.

Tool lending circle



Create a simple list of tools neighbours are willing to lend, with clear arrangements for borrowing and returning them.

Dog walkers' group



An informal 7am walk that's really just a reason to start the day together.

Halloween street map



Households that participate hang a balloon. Families feel safe; kids feel the magic.

Rotating dinner night



Four households, four turns a year. You only have to cook once and eat together three other times.

Walking school bus



Parents take turns walking a group of kids to school. Builds trust, saves time.

Driveway music evening



Anyone who plays an instrument. An hour before sunset. BYO chair and blanket.

Community planting day



Council often supplies free trees. Organise a morning to plant them — a physical legacy.

Skills-sharing afternoon



30-minute sessions in someone's backyard: sourdough, first aid, tiling, composting.

✚ Dozens more ideas, seasonal calendars, templates and a printable neighbour welcome card at nhw.com.au

Four pillars of a connected neighbourhood

1 Knowing each other

You can't look out for someone you've never met. The foundation of everything is simply being on first-name terms.

- Introduce yourself within the first week
- Share a contact number with immediate neighbours
- Get to know the people who live nearby
- Welcome newcomers when they arrive

2 Communicating regularly

A connected community has channels — ways for people to share information, ask for help and stay informed.

- A street group chat or Neighbours app
- Regular in-person catch-ups, however informal
- A simple way to share useful local information
- Sharing useful local info and updates

3 Caring for shared spaces

When people take pride in where they live, it shows — and it creates an environment that's welcoming to everyone.

- Keep communal areas tidy and inviting
- Report damage and maintenance issues
- Participate in clean-up days
- Beautify the street together

4 Looking out for each other

The quietest and most powerful form of community — simply being present, noticing, and caring about the people around you.

- Check in on elderly or isolated neighbours
- Help neighbours make their homes look occupied when they are away
- Be alert to suspicious activity and report it through the appropriate channels
- Be the neighbour you'd want to have



Everyone has a part to play



Local residents and volunteers

- Organise the first street event — even just a driveway morning tea
- Maintain the street group chat or community app
- Keep a loose record of who lives where
- Welcome every new resident personally
- Connect with your local NHW group or NHW Victoria
- Be the person others know they can call
- Pass the role on — leadership shared is leadership sustained

Residents and households

- Introduce yourself to three neighbours in your first month
- Share your phone number with immediate neighbours
- Join the street group chat or community app
- Attend at least one community event per season
- Welcome new arrivals to the street
- Check in on neighbours who seem isolated
- Volunteer for one street or community role

NHW Victoria and community partners

- Provide practical crime-prevention information and resources
- Help residents connect with an existing local NHW group
- Provide guidance about establishing an official NHW group
- Support recognised NHW groups and volunteers
- Help connect communities with relevant local organisations
- Share information from Victoria Police and other trusted sources
- Promote inclusive and sustainable community participation



Digital tools that bring people together

Technology works best when it supplements real connection — not replaces it. These tools help communities stay in touch, share information and coordinate easily.



Neighbours app

Australia's leading neighbourhood platform. Post local alerts, find lost pets, and share information with verified nearby residents.



WhatsApp or Signal group

A simple group chat for your street. Best kept small (under 30 people) and focused — great for quick alerts and coordination.



Official NHW Facebook group

An official NHW group can use Facebook to share local crime-prevention information, promote activities and connect residents. Contact NHW Victoria before using the NHW name or branding.



Shared Google calendar

One calendar for the whole street. BBQs, school holidays, community workdays. Everyone can see what's coming up.



NHW resources

Crime-prevention information, campaign materials and resources for recognised NHW groups are available through NHW Victoria.



Shared photo album

A Google Photos or iCloud album shared with the street. Nothing builds belonging like a shared history of memories.

Connection is the foundation of a safe community

Sticky neighbourhoods: what the research shows

Communities with strong social bonds — where neighbours know each other by name, share spaces and look out for one another — consistently report higher feelings of safety, lower rates of antisocial behaviour and greater overall wellbeing. Connection isn't a nice-to-have. It's the infrastructure of a safe life.

Natural surveillance

People who know their neighbours are more likely to notice unusual activity, share appropriate crime-prevention information and support one another.

Faster emergency response

When you know your neighbours, you're more likely to call for help quickly and act when instinct says something is wrong.

Reduced isolation

Isolated individuals are more vulnerable. Connected communities naturally include people — elderly residents, new parents, those going through hard times.

Deterrence through presence

Active streets with engaged residents are demonstrably less attractive to opportunistic behaviour than quiet, anonymous ones.

Trust in institutions

Communities with strong social cohesion are more likely to report concerns to police and council — and to have those concerns acted upon.

Resilience in crises

From floods to fires to power outages, communities that already know each other respond and recover faster. Social capital is emergency infrastructure.



Ready to get started?

Download a copy of this checklist using the QR code.

Stick it on the fridge, and work through it in your first year. Small actions, done consistently, build something extraordinary.

In your first month

- O Introduce yourself to three neighbours
- O Exchange numbers with next-door neighbours
- O Join the street group chat or Neighbours app
- O Find out if there's a local NHW group
- O Learn your local councillor's name
- O Locate your nearest community centre

In your first year

- O Host or attend a street event
- O Connect with your local NHW group or attend a community meeting
- O Establish a tool or skill sharing arrangement
- O Welcome a new resident to the street
- O Check in on an elderly or isolated neighbour
- O Volunteer for one community role

Ongoing, forever

- O Attend seasonal street events
- O Greet new arrivals with a welcome
- O Keep contact details up to date
- O Know how to report suspicious activity through the appropriate channels
- O Participate in local NHW activities throughout the year
- O Share this guide with a new neighbour

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