

# How to be a good witness to crimes in our community



# 4 W's (Who, What, When, Where)

The ability to accurately describe an event and provide descriptions are extremely valuable when reporting a crime. The more information gathered, the better the chance police have to prevent further injury and/or property loss, as well as catch the subject(s) responsible.

Anytime you witness a crime or suspicious activity, it's a good idea to write everything down as soon as you can. Write down anything you can think of, including: what you saw, heard, and smelt.

Make sure you write details down in a safe space – never put yourself at risk.

It is essential to know the **4 Ws (Who, What, When, Where)**, since call-takers will ask these questions when you alert them of a crime. Do not hesitate to report even if you are unsure about the 4 Ws, any information is helpful.

Your memory is more accurate the sooner you write everything down. If you do not know the answer to a question, the best answer is: "I don't know" – don't guess to try and 'help' the situation, police rely on your answers being as accurate as possible.

1. **What** happened?
2. **When** did the event happen?
3. **Where** did it take place?
4. **Who** is the suspect and what do they look like?

# Describing people

When describing a person, it helps to start from the head down, paying attention to any distinctive features including visible scars, piercings, tattoos, facial hair, or birthmarks.

Try to be able to describe the following:

- ✓ **Basic description:** height, weight, build
- ✓ **Clothing description:** writing, distinct patterns or colours, colour and style of shoes
- ✓ **Physical description:** distinct marks, scars, or tattoos. If possible, hair colour, length and style; eye colour, facial hair, race
- ✓ **Interaction:** Try to recall exactly what was said and how it was said

Remember what was said between suspects if there were multiple; did they use names, nicknames, or any other potential identifiers?

# Describing vehicles or other modes of transportation

When describing a vehicle or other mode of transportation, it helps police by identifying the following:

- ✓ Make, model, colour
- ✓ License plate (if possible), even a partial is helpful
- ✓ Identifiable markings or damage (stickers, rusting, tint, burnt out tail/head light, etc.)
- ✓ Number of visible occupants.
- ✓ Was the suspect the driver or a passenger?
- ✓ If impaired: a driving pattern (i.e.: weaving in lanes, speeds, etc.)
- ✓ Direction of travel

Direction of travel is vital information if a person or vehicle is fleeing a scene.



# Describing residences or locations

When describing residences or locations, it helps police by taking note of the following:

- ✓ Entrances & lane ways
- ✓ If reporting a break and enter: entrance used to gain access or exit; other entrances and how entrance(s) are approached.
- ✓ Is there movement in the location? Are there any lights on? Can you see the individual(s) and what are they doing?

It is also important to note if any weapons or tools were used in the incident and their description.

Also note if any property was stolen or damaged, and their description(s).  
**DO NOT TOUCH OR MOVE ANYTHING** before police arrive at the scene. You do not want to risk contaminating a crime scene or impede any investigation efforts.

# In case of EMERGENCY call 9-1-1

Types of emergencies include:

- ✓ **Immediate threat to person or property** (screams, attacks, gunshots, fires, car accidents with injuries, any other medical emergency)
- ✓ **A substantive crime in progress** (fights, break & enters if suspect is still on scene, report impaired driver)
- ✓ **A serious crime has just occurred** (sexual assault, robbery)
- ✓ **A suspicious circumstance that may indicate an imminent criminal act** (vandal, prowler)

## In person

You can report a crime in person by going to the nearest police station (**UCCM 5926 ON-540, M'Chigeeng** or talking to an officer that crosses your path.

## Over the phone

You can call the police at any time for assistance or to report a crime. If it is NOT an emergency, call your local police non-emergency line (**UCCM- (705)-377-7135**). They are available 24 hours a day to assist you. examples of non-emergency crimes include:

- ✓ A crime has already been committed and no suspects are present (theft from vehicle or home, vandalism, fraud)
- ✓ Suspicious activity or circumstance, less serious nuisance behaviour
- ✓ If you want follow up information on a report you have previously made

# Why should I report a crime

When you come forward and report a crime to police, the information you provide has the ability to help bring an offender to justice. It is natural to feel intimidated or uncertain about reporting a crime, however doing so helps decrease the likelihood of someone else being victimized, increases community safety, and gives police better knowledge about crime trends in a given area.

- ✓ You or someone else may need protection from the person who committed the crime
- ✓ It can help you, your loved ones, and your community from future crimes
- ✓ It can provide the opportunity to deal with and heal from the harm done to you or others
- ✓ There is a better chance of arresting the person responsible when you alert police as soon as possible
- ✓ Your report/information may stop someone from committing another/future crime
- ✓ Be able to make an insurance claim for damaged or stolen property
- ✓ Reporting provides Police with an accurate understanding of what is happening in our community
- ✓ Reporting is important for accurate crime stats. This gives more leverage to request extra police officers, vehicles etc.
- ✓ Help identify target crime areas to RCMP