You can do a lot to improve your safety while living in off-campus housing! For starters, recognize that you

**TIPS FOR SAFER DAILY LIVING**

- Keep doors and windows locked at all times, even when you are home. Insist your landlord repair damaged locks, broken locks, windows, and doors immediately!
- Always close window coverings at night and when you are not at home. Hint: Hang blinds/curtains over every window, and if your front or back door contains a large window be sure to cover it with a curtain or by installing a storm door.
- Never reveal to someone that you are alone — either on the phone, or standing outside your door. When a visitor is outside your door, call out, “I’ll get it!” to create the impression that other people are inside with you.
- Avoid entering elevators with strangers. When in an elevator with a stranger, stand by the control panel. If confronted in a threatening way, pull the emergency alarm and leave the floor immediately. Don’t press the stop button!
- Remove your address from local telephone directories and UT Directory Services, and only list your phone number with a first initial and last name. Label buzz-in call boxes and mail boxes at your residence with only your first initial and last name as well.
- Never leave a note on your door or voicemail greeting implying you are not home.
- Record a generic voicemail greeting — nothing that indicates your schedule or that you will be in or out of your residence.
- If you lose your keys, have your landlord change your locks immediately. A digitized message saying no one is available to take the call is your best bet.
- Make sure all keys to your residence are always inside.
- Whether you are looking for an apartment or have lived in off-campus

**When someone is at your door**

- Always look through a peephole or window to see who it is before you open the door. If you do not recognize the visitor, ask them questions through the door so they can identify themselves.
- Demand all service/repair personnel show official identification, and confirm with your landlord or roommates that someone actually needs and wants the service order.
- When in doubt, never let a stranger into your home. If someone knocks on your door and asks to come in simply use your phone, you may offer to make the call for them, but never let them inside.

**General safety**

- Check smoke detectors monthly to make sure they work. If you don’t have smoke detectors, ask your landlord to install one, or ask if you’re allowed to install one yourself.
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**Going on vacation?**

- Temporarily stop delivery services, or have a friend collect your mail, until you return.
- Also, if you have a front yard, mow the lawn before you leave. A pile of mail outside your home and an overgrown lawn will make your apartment seem unoccupied.
- Use a utility timer to automatically turn on lights and electronic devices on and off while you are gone. You can purchase timers from supermarkets and home-supply stores.
- Store valuables out of sight, and/or locked away. When you go home for the holidays, take your valuables (portable music player, photographs, and jewelry) with you.
- Keep your birdbaths in secure places, and move all items from inside your car to discourage theft.
- Let a neighbor know when you will be gone. Ask them to watch for anything suspicious around your property, and give them a phone number where they can contact you in an emergency.

**APARTMENT HUNTER’S CHECKLIST**

- **Is the property in a safe neighborhood?** To research crime rates of different Austin neighborhoods, go to the Austin Police Department’s Crime Prevention website to look up crime safety facts by zip code or even apartment complex.
- **www.austintexas.gov/police/crime-prevention**
- **Are address numbers clearly visible?** This helps police, fire fighters and EMS locate your residence in an emergency.
- **Are public areas well lit?** Unmarked parking spaces are best, because the presence or absence of a light can give the appearance of someone being home. A vacant parking space labeled with its corresponding apartment number could lead to potential burglary of an empty home!
- **Are shrubs and trees around the property trimmed and maintained?** Overgrown plant life provide a hiding place for potential intruders, in particular any way of easy entry to your apartment/complex.
- **What is the timeframe for completion of repair work?** Talk to current residents about their experiences regarding repairs. Remember that many issues involve your personal safety, so it is important to live in a residence where management responds to maintenance requests in a timely manner.
- **When was the last Fire Marshal inspection?** Ask to see a copy of the last inspection, and check the items on the property or is it not in compliance. If the inspection was several years ago, do a mini inspection yourself. Hint: Look for the hazards such as dumpsters within 20 feet of the residence and garbage cans stored on balconies. Also, check inspection logs on the extinguishers and sprinkler systems — the tags should show proof of inspections within the last year.
- **Does the apartment/house have a working smoke detector?** For fire safety your home must have at least one smoke detector and two escape emergency routes. There should also be an extinguisher either mounted near the kitchen/ or outside of plain view of the front door.
- **Do doors and windows have sturdy locks?** Do not enter an apartment/house that has doors/ windows that are mere cardboard. Good deadbolts have at least 1” throw: this means that when you lock it, the lock should stick out at least 1” into the lockset (in addition to all windows, and sliding glass doors should have secondary locks, such as Charlie Bar at that lock, and others should be locked set in the lockset. For sliding glass doors, if possible, lock the sliding glass door, and use locks on the outside to keep it from opening.
- **Doors and windows have sturdy locks?**
- **Does the door front have a secondary lock that is only accessible from inside the apartment/house?** This should help prevent criminal entry. It should be a key, locked by someone with a key while you are away. If there is no secondary lock like this, ask the landlord whether you can have one installed.
- **Before you sign a lease…**
- **Is the landlord showing you the actual apartment/house you’re signing?** Ask to see the actual apartment/house you’re signing, not just a model unit. Then ask the landlord to fill out a “Move-In Inventory Form” and take photographs of the amenities, demand he or she put them in writing.
- **Are there any binding contracts?** You are responsible for paying the rent until the end of the lease term, and no excuses (e.g. you’re fired). If you are not satisfied with the contract, contact the University’s Legal Services office.
- **Make sure all blanks on the lease are filled in correctly.** Ask your landlord to place a check mark next to any copy of your lease. Also, before you sign your lease, ask the landlord if there are any damages you record on the form. This will help protect your interests in case of difficulty. If you sign your lease, make sure you receive a copy of the lease, and you fully understand all of its terms.
- **Do you own a dog?** Many landlords do not want a pet. Ask if there will be a charge to keep a dog, or “Close Patrol Check” of your property.
- **Do you have a home security system?** Ask whether there will be a charge to re-key the doors in your apartment.
- **Are the apartment/ house on your security alarm list?** If the residence has an alarm system, find out whether the alarm reports to the main office, an alarm monitoring company, or “Close Patrol Check” of your property.
- **Finally, ask the landlord if you’re signing a binding contract.** You are responsible for paying the rent until the end of the lease term, and no excuses (e.g. you’re fired). If you are not satisfied with the contract, contact the University’s Legal Services office.
When looking for a new place to live, consider many factors like proximity to campus and laundry facilities. Safety should also be a major factor you think about before renting an apartment or house.

Ask yourself: Does this home and surrounding neighborhood feel safe? It is important to trust your instincts about the general safety of a property, but there are also specific things you can look for to determine how safe a place is from crime and fire.

Make copies of the checklist in the brochure and fill one out for each property you visit. This way, even if you are distracted by promises of move-in specials and Olympic-sized swimming pools, you will have a record of each property’s safety to look back on when making your decision.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Non-Emergency
311
austintexas.gov/department/311

APD
512-974-5000
austintexas.gov/department/police

Capital Area Crime Stoppers
512-472-8477
austincrimestoppers.org
An anonymous hotline for reporting criminal activity, in exchange for a possible financial reward

APD Auto Theft Unit
512-974-5265
austintexas.gov/department/auto-theft-unit

APD Victim Services
512-974-0237
austintexas.gov/department/victim-services

Safe Alliance
512-267-SAFE (7233)
safeaustin.org
A sexual assault and relationship violence hotline

UTPD
512-471-4447 ext. 9
police.utexas.edu

UT Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center
512-471-3515
Monday-Friday 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Crisis Line: 512-471-Call (2255)
cmhc.utexas.edu

UT Austin Legal Services for Students
512-471-7796
Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
deanofstudents.utexas.edu/lss
Handles disputes involving landlord-tenant, consumer and contract laws. Consultations by appointment only

UT Austin Student Emergency Services
512-471-5017
deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency
Provides support during an emergency

APARTMENT HUNTER’S CHECKLIST

BE SAFE