

My Florida Home Book 2.8: Being a Good Neighbor¹

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Good Neighbor: A Valuable Resource

Getting to know your neighbors has many advantages including increasing the security of your own home and maintaining property values. Your neighbors can provide a social and service network to help you with home repairs, pet care, and generally "lend a hand" if you need assistance. You and your neighbors probably share two important concerns: preventing crime and protecting your property values.

Connecting with Your Neighbors

Children often are the first to get to know their neighbors in the course of school or play. They provide a natural way for you to meet other parents. However, if you do not have children living at home, making contact with neighbors may take more effort.

How to Get to Know Your Neighbors

- When you move in (or when they move in), introduce yourself. Let them know that if something that you or your children do – or neglect to do – bother them, you hope they will talk to you about it. Assures them that you want to be good neighbors and that you need to know if they have concerns.
- Invite your neighbors to an open house, potluck picnic, or barbecue.
- Attend and get involved with the Neighborhood Association, Neighborhood Watch, or Neighborhood Block parties. Taking part in these activities can be a great way to help the neighborhood, stay current in news about the crime or other changing trends, and as a way to get to know your neighbors.
- Spend time in your yard and your neighborhood. If you are doing yard work, people may be interested in what you are doing and stop to talk. Take walks after dinner and take the time to talk with neighbors who are in their yards.

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- Walk your dog, if you have one. Dog walking provides an opportunity to meet other neighbors. Dogs often are eager to approach other people and dogs and people often are more willing to speak and approach friendly animals than they are willing to make contact with other people. The dog can serve as a social buffer to allow you to start conversations with new people. Remember to be a good neighbor by managing your pets so they do not annoy your neighbors. This means:

- Follow lease laws. Keep your dog inside your home or outside within a secured yard area with shade and water. Dogs can easily crawl under and jump fences if they are not properly installed, maintained, sized of your dog. Verify that your dog does not bark excessively in your absence or exhibit aggressive behavior – both characteristics can disturb your neighbors. If need be, enroll you and your dog in obedience school.
- When walking your dog, carry pooper-scooper bags with you to clean up pet waste.
- If you have a cat, keep the cat indoors to prevent it from roaming the neighborhood for its own safety. If you do allow your cat outdoors, make sure your cat is neutered. Provide fresh water and shade. Feed your cat indoors. If it is necessary to feed the cat outside, make sure all the leftover food is removed to prevent attracting wild cats, raccoons, and rodents.

Crime Prevention

Most residential crimes occur when criminals see an easy opportunity. For example, if they see a home with several newspapers on the front porch, mail overflowing from the mailbox, no light on, trashcans left in the driveway, and no neighbors about, they check further and find an easy entry through an unforted door or an unlocked window.

Watching out for each other can make criminal activity more difficult, since the risk of being caught

increase. Knowing your neighbors and paying attention to what activity is normal or abnormal around the neighborhood and your neighbors' homes can help maintain the safety of others. A good neighborhood is always aware of the happenings in the neighborhood.

When you know and trust your neighbors, you can ask them to bring in your mail when you are away and then return the favor for them. This can help prevent mail fraud crime and help prevent criminals from knowing that you are not at home.

You may ask the local police or sheriff's department to talk to you and your neighbors about starting a neighborhood watch program if one does not exist. Create a neighborhood email list or develop a neighborhood home chart that lists the names of residents and their telephone numbers so that you can communicate quickly in the event of a neighborhood problem or emergency.

Protecting Property Values

The home you own is a large investment. This investment can grow as property values in the neighborhood increase. Property values in the neighborhood can increase if the neighborhood is kept attractive, and yards and homes are kept in good repair. Unfortunately, property values can and will decline if everyone does not keep their property and neighborhood safe, attractive, and in good repair. A good neighbor maintains his or her home and property so that the property retains and increases its value, and so it does not detract from the value of others' property.

Here are some actions that can help you and your neighbors maintain your property values:

1. Pay your mortgage and homeowner association dues on time.
2. Keep your home painted and in good repair. Paint your home a color that compliments the architectural theme of the neighborhood or blends with the paint colors of the other homes in the neighborhood.

3. Keep your roof in good repair.
4. Do not leave junk lying around the outside your home. Purchase a shed or other storage container to organize your gardening pots, tools, tires, etc. If items are worn or broken, dispose of them through your trash pick-up or take them to the dump or a recycle center instead of leaving them discarded around the outside of your home.
5. Make sure your grass and shrubs are trimmed and neat. Keep weeds pulled and the grass mowed a healthy height for the type of grass. Overgrown landscapes are habitats for rodents, snakes, and other pests. Overgrown shrubs and trees also provide hiding spaces for criminals.
6. Do not leave your trash and recycling containers out after pick-up. Besides being a visual distraction, they can become road hazards. Try to arrange for someone to return the containers from the roadsides if you cannot. Be a good neighbor and bring another neighbor's containers in as an act of kindness, especially if your neighbor is in ill health or physically frail.
7. Manage the parking of your family cars in a neat and orderly manner on your own property. However, parking your cars on your lawn destroys your lawn and can contribute to a decrease in the value of the neighborhood. Try not park in the road in front of your neighbor's home except for special circumstances. Some neighborhoods have ordinances against parking in the street.
8. Keep toys and recreational items stored neatly in the garage, carport, or backyard. Teach your children to put away their toys after use and not leave them lying about the yard. If you have a boat or recreational vehicle, park it in an approved designated area in the neighborhood.

References

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