

## SAFETY TIPS FOR UKRAINIAN EVACUEES

### WHO SEARCH ONLINE FOR FREE ACCOMMODATION WITH HOST FAMILIES IN CANADA

***Although the vast majority of people who advertise their homes online and want to host Ukrainians fleeing the war, are honest and genuinely want to help you find a safe place, it is also important to remember that many such online services are not regulated. You need to be aware of your personal safety, remain vigilant, and follow a few rules to avoid potentially unsafe and dangerous situations (i.e., harassment, abuse, human trafficking) when searching online for free accommodation, arranging viewings, and moving in with Canadian host families. Here are some tips to help you stay safe:***

#### **Important considerations**

*Consider some of the below while communicating online with your potential host family:*

- Never sign or pay anything for a property advertised online as “free accommodation.”
- Make sure you can trust people you talk to online (e.g., ask their full names; do a quick Google search or have a look at their LinkedIn profiles to ensure they are real and legitimate people).
- Be careful with sharing your personal information. Identity theft is a big business. Sharing some information (i.e., your name and email address) is acceptable, but keep other important information (e.g., your I.D. documents, financial information) off-limits.
- Ask questions and avoid any situation where you are not getting nearly enough information.
- If responses are dishonest in one or two ways, your host family may be hiding other things.
- Always use your common sense. Trust your instincts and do not let the pressure of finding something quickly cloud your judgement.
- Connect with one of settlement agencies (<https://aaisa.ca/membership-directory/>) to help you facilitate the search and make right connections. Make sure you do not feel isolated and have some supports in place.

#### **Meeting the family and viewing the place**

*Once in Canada, you may want to arrange some viewings before you commit to a particular host family.*

- Find out the exact address of the property before you visit and try to avoid meeting anywhere else. If possible, take someone with you to meet the family and view the property (e.g., a relative, a friend, a Settlement Counsellor) or at least notify them of where you will be going, who you are meeting and what time you expect the viewing to end. Tell them that you will call around that time and, if you have not called, ask that they give you 5 minutes and then call you.
- Check the neighborhood to decide if you are happy with the safety of the surrounding streets. If you are unfamiliar with the area, it is worth visiting it at nighttime as well as during the day.

- Have a look at the host's I.D. (i.e., passport or driver's license). Your host can also ask to see your I.D. Please do not hand in or leave your I.D. or other important documents with your host. Always keep your personal documents with you and secure.
- Ask if you can meet everyone who lives or will be living at the property. Try to get to know your host family. Ask questions, be curious, and try to learn about them more. This will help you get to know the people you potentially will be living with, and give you a sense of their characters.
- Ask questions and view the place where you will be staying. Ask if you will have a separate entrance to your room and whether your room can be locked.
- Check that all the locks on doors and windows are working properly. Ask about other security measures in place.
- See if there is a special place to keep your documents and valuables secure (e.g., a safe).
- Discuss boundaries, expectations, and house rules (e.g., common spaces and set up rules for those spaces; expectations for sharing, i.e., food, toiletries, etc.; cooking habits; chores and cleanliness expectations; if pets are allowed; rules around smoking; quiet hours and noise level expectations; having guests; privacy; etc.).
- Always trust your instincts – if something does not feel right, do not go ahead with the move.
- If you like the host family, the place and what it has to offer, see if you can sign a written agreement covering your rights and responsibilities with your host. While a verbal agreement is legal, a written agreement will provide a record of the terms the parties agree to.
- Please remember that after meeting the host family and viewing the place, you do not have an obligation to commit. You may want to meet a couple more hosts before making a final decision.
- If you live with a host family, make sure that you are treated with dignity and respect. Make sure that you are not taken advantage of by your hosts (i.e., physical/emotional abuse; lured into any illegal activities; controlled, e.g., your I.D.s are taken away from you; isolated; etc.).

### **Support services near you**

*If you find yourself in an unsafe and/or dangerous situation, remember that there is help near you:*

- Call **9-1-1** (24/7) if immediate action is required
- Helpline for Edmonton and Northern Alberta (24/7), call **1-800-232-7288**
- Helpline for Calgary and Southern Alberta (24/7), call **(403) 266-HELP (4357)**
- To find information on shelters in Alberta:
  - Visit <https://sheltersafe.ca/alberta/>
  - Call (24/7) **1-866-331-3933**
- Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline (24/7), call **1-833-900-1010**
- Call **2-1-1** (24/7) for information on community, social, and health services