

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Calling the Police – Silently

Number 43 in a series of notes on important issues.

From childhood probably, most of us know that, if you want to call the police (or for that matter if you need an ambulance or the fire brigade), you dial ‘999’. This emergency number, manned twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, we always resort to if we need help, particularly now that the individual police officer on the beat is no longer a common sight.

A call to ‘999’ is directed to an emergency call centre where the operator will ask you to say which emergency service you want to contact. If you do not answer or if the operator hears anything suspicious, your call will be transferred to a police call handler.

The wider, almost universal, use of mobile telephones has created a problem for this emergency service. It is easier to make a ‘999’ call by accident from a mobile telephone. If it is not locked or turned off, the ‘9’ button can unwittingly be touched three times in succession, perhaps in a coat pocket, and this will result in a call – apparently an emergency – that results in a silence and is transferred to the police call handler. Sadly, there are lots of such calls.

To meet this challenge, the police have developed a ‘Silent Solution’ system. This system is valuable and we need to be aware of it because we might need it if we want to contact the police but the making of any sound may put us or someone else in danger.

The system gives an automated message lasting twenty seconds saying – ‘you are through to the police’ and asking you to press ‘55’. If you do not press ‘55’, the call will be terminated. If you do press ‘55’, the operator will transfer you to your local police force.

The police operator will not be able to track your location but will try to communicate with you by asking simple ‘yes’, ‘no’ questions. If you cannot speak, even by whispering, listen carefully to their questions and instructions.

The police should be able to trace a silent call made on a land line which will be transferred to a police call handler, who may remain on the line for forty-five seconds if you replace the handset – just in case you pick it up again.

Note that the ‘999’ number is for emergencies **only** – when a crime is in progress, when a suspect is nearby, when there is danger to life or violence is used or threatened.

You should call ‘101’ for matters that do not require an emergency response, such as car theft, property damage or suspected drug use or dealing. Use that number too to provide information about crime in your area and to make general enquiries.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall