

Excerpt from *Finding Community:* *You'll Feel Safer*

You'll Feel Safer

People feel safer living in an intentional community, since they're usually surrounded by people they know and trust. Even in urban communities they often live on a larger parcel of land than if they lived in a single-family home. This property is not only familiar and welcoming to them, but also serves as a buffer zone between them and outside property, creating kind of a "safe inside the nest" effect. People in group households in a large house in a city also feel more secure. When you are home there are usually a few other people there too. This helps people feel a sense of familiarity, comfort, and ease.

According to gerontologist Deborah Altus, who conducted a study with 60 residents of three rural senior cooperative housing communities, 95 percent said that living in the co-op had a good effect on their personal safety. (Altus, D. E., & Mathews, R. M, *Cooperative Housing Journal*, 1977.)

At Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina, where I live, people walk freely along the roads from one neighborhood to another, even late at night, with a feeling of complete familiarity and comfort.

Compared to the increasingly violent mainstream culture, intentional communities are islands of safety for women, who are much less likely to encounter abusive or threatening strangers near their home. They're much less likely to fear getting beat up or raped.

"There are almost no reports of attacks or physical violence at all in any of the communities I have visited or have knowledge of," writes Keenan Dakota, who has lived at Twin Oaks community in Virginia since 1984 and visited many others. "Except for armed survivalist communities, the members of every community I'm familiar with appear to be open and trusting. Compare this to the often constant caution and awareness of potential danger present in mainstream culture."

In community, children feel safe — and their parents feel relieved. Concern for their children's safety and well being is a major reason some families join communities, in fact. Since people drive cars more slowly on community roads, or, as in cohousing communities, cars are confined to the edge of the property, children are in much less danger of getting hit by cars. Not only that, children are surrounded by caring adults besides their parents who look out for them.

Even domestic violence appears to be less common in communities, although people certainly *do* bring their emotional problems with them when they join communities. However, consider the "fish bowl effect" of living in community. Not much goes on in a household in community

that one's neighbors aren't aware of. If the community is small enough, and close enough, people won't let abuse within a family continue. The group will call a meeting with the family to try to work it out, or send people with good processing and communication skills over to talk with the family. Even if such interventions are seen as unwelcome meddling, it does put the family members on notice that the "community eye" is upon them, and even that slight amount of social pressure can induce people to behave better towards one another. It not only "takes a village to raise a child," it takes a village to raise all of us!

—From Chapter 1: "Why Community?"