



STAYING SAFE

Guidelines From TANA TEAM-Square

USA is a favorite destination for Telugu people for tourism, education, and employment. USA is generally a safe place. However, in the last few years, we have seen many catastrophic incidents in which many of our fellow Telugu people have been affected. TANA, as the premier organization of Telugus in USA, has been involved in providing aid and comfort to victims and their families in almost all these incidents.

After carefully studying the circumstances surrounding some of the recent incidents, we see that while each incident is unique in many aspects, there are some common elements in these incidents. The total number of incidents is relatively small compared to the overall size of the Telugu community in USA. However, the impact of these incidents is enormous on the families of the victims, who are often thousands of miles away.

The common catastrophes we have seen are deaths and injuries due to accidents (mostly automobile related), violence (particularly among working students), illness, and suicides. Other incidents include encounters with law enforcement agencies, particularly the immigration department. Lack of adequate insurance often seems to compound the problems. Recent arrivals to USA seem to be involved in these incidents in a disproportionately high number of catastrophes.

Awareness of potential threats to safety and good safety practices can help minimize or mitigate these catastrophic incidents. We present some recommendations for safety for all of us whether we are here as visitors, students, non-immigrants, or immigrants.

In general, everyone should:

- ✓ **Avoid dangerous Places and Situations**
- ✓ **Follow the Law**
- ✓ **Carry adequate auto, health and life Insurances.**

Students

There are a large number of students of Telugu origin that come to USA every year in pursuit of further studies. However, most of these students do not have any financial aid and campus jobs are hard to come by. The financial difficulties lead the students into taking increasing risks, a major contributor to catastrophic incidents.

1. Students coming for education in the USA should come prepared with enough money to cover education and living expenses for entire period of study, not just for one or two semesters.
2. While it is tempting to take part-time jobs outside campus, many of these jobs are dangerous. The risk of violence is very high in jobs involving cash-management like convenience stores, gas stations, and delivery services, particularly so in late shifts and in high-crime areas.
3. Maintain Health Insurance. Insurance may cost you some money, but it is very essential. Lack of insurance can turn out to be a lot costlier than insurance premiums. Check with your university regarding low cost group health insurance availability.
4. Maintain a valid visa status and be responsive to the International Student Department at all times.
5. Do not work at unauthorized or illegal part time jobs while you are on a Student visa. It may lead towards incarceration, deportation and debarment from future visits to the USA.

Avoiding Confrontation

Confrontation or avoidable misunderstanding appears to be a common cause leading to violence. Situations can escalate quickly and may result in serious consequences, particularly if the other person is armed.

1. Do not try to argue with strangers. Most of the arguments end up in a fight and you have a lot more to lose than the other person.
2. Do not make rude gestures (like showing your middle finger, pointing etc.) or swear at people. Control your anger for a moment or two until the situation passes by, even if you have been wronged. There are other, safer ways of dealing with things.
3. If you encounter a robber or a mugger demanding money or valuables, NEVER try to resist or wrestle. Whatever you lose in the robbery can be earned back, but not a lost life.
4. There have been incidents, where people of Indian origin staring at others and talking in a non-English language among themselves caused misunderstanding and led to fights. When in public places, please try to talk only in English.
5. Do not stare at other people, especially strangers. Sometimes, people get offended easily.
6. Try to commingle with local students or local community so that you will not be treated as a stranger. Wandering only in groups of Indians will lead to isolation and alienation from local community.

Driving

Most of the serious events in our community are a result of automobile accidents. While we cannot control all the factors resulting in an accident, common sense safety practices can decrease the risk of accidents and minimize injuries.

1. Always, fasten seat belts irrespective to the local laws - even if you are a passenger in a rear seat. Seat belts certainly protect you in even serious accidents.
2. Do not drive if you do not have an appropriate license or adequate automobile insurance.
3. Before you begin to drive in USA, take at least couple of driving lessons to understand the basics of the driving. Even if you have had lots of experience in India, the rules, driving conditions, and speeds are very different and the resulting confusion can lead to accidents. Therefore, appropriate driver training is most essential.
4. Always try to avoid late night travel. Though you may be fully conscious and competent, there are thousands of drunk or sleepy drivers on the roads, more so at late nights.
5. Do not drive under influence of alcohol or any other substances or drugs. Ensure that there is a sober designated driver in your group.
6. Do not ever stop on the break-down lanes of any highway, unless your car breaks down. In such events, get out of your car and stay far away from the moving traffic.
7. If you are ever pulled over by a police officer, do not get out of your car unless the officer asks you to do it. Keep your hands only on the steering and wait for the officer.
8. Pedestrians, unlike in India, have the right of way at most of the places. Do not get too close to them while you are driving.
9. Always maintain a safe stopping distance while you are driving. This is a basic rule of driving. The safe distance is determined by the weather conditions.
10. If you ever come across a road accident, please do not rush to rescue people involved in the accident. If you are not careful or trained, you may hurt them instead of helping.
11. Do not leave your wallet or any other expensive items exposed and unattended in your car.
12. If you are tired or sleepy, stop immediately at a safe place and take a break. Just another mile is not too short to take a chance.
13. Do not Text/SMS on your cell phones while driving. Using a cell phone (without a hands-free option) while driving is illegal in most of the sates. Check your local laws.
14. Do not offer a ride to any hitchhikers or unknown persons.

15. Do not seek a ride from unknown person.
16. If you are a pedestrian, cross the streets or highways only at the designated places. Always follow the traffic signals.

Apartment / Home / Dorm room

1. Always keep your apartment/home/ dorm doors (also windows if you are in ground or first floor) locked and secure.
2. Never ever disconnect, break or block smoke detectors in your apartments/homes either to smoke or to cook for parties.
3. Lately, Indian community has become a primary target for robbers, as we tend to keep valuable jewelry at home. There were incidents where burglars followed their targets from Parties and social gatherings. Do not keep your valuable jewelry, documents and certificates at home or apartment. A safe-deposit box (locker) is a much safer place. It costs very little, and is worth the safety of your personal property and yourself.
4. Ensure that a trusted friend has a key to your place to help in cases of emergencies.

Suicidal and Behavioral Emergencies

There are many resources available in all local communities to help people with emotional or behavioral problems. Usually, there is a community mental health center or a crisis center that can provide crisis management and emergency services. Please check your local phone directory. In case of emergency, by calling 911, local law enforcement can be requested to provide the necessary help. Even if you do not have insurance, ongoing treatment for mental health problems can be obtained from the local community mental health agencies.

There is a Toll-free Nationwide Hotline (1-800-273-TALK) that can be reached to provide assistance for people feeling suicidal.

Visas

Understand the limitations and privileges particular to your visa status. Violating the immigration laws can lead to imprisonment and deportation.

Law & Order

1. Obey the law. As long as you are living in the USA, it's absolutely necessary that you follow the local laws. There are no ways to escape, if you commit a crime knowingly or unknowingly.
2. Do not approach or touch lonely children - even if they are your neighbors.
3. Do not offer any food or drinks to children unless they are accompanied by their parents and permit you to do it.
4. Do not touch or rub any unknown people in public places, swimming pools, theaters etc.
5. Do not attempt to fake or forge any identifications, prescriptions and certifications.
6. Do not falsify any documents that are eventually scrutinized by the universities, governmental agencies or potential employers. There was an Indian student who got arrested, prosecuted and deported for carrying blank letterheads and rubber stamps/seals of an university.
7. Do not carry any weapons unless you have a valid license to carry them.
8. Be extremely cautious in air travel & public transportation. Even though it is unfair, in the post 9-11 environment, people with brown skin are at a higher risk for suspicion. Make sure that you do not carry any sharp objects, or flammable liquids.
9. Do not trespass on any private properties. Even if you lost your way, do not knock on residential doors as a stranger.

Domestic Violence

Violence against anybody, even your family members, is against the law. The definition of assaultive behavior is very broad – even unwanted touching is considered assaultive. The law enforcement authorities are very sensitive about incidents of domestic violence and take it very seriously.

1. If ever there is a dispute or an argument, never get physical or violent. Even a small incident can ruin your entire career and life.
2. Do not touch in anger or cause any injury to your spouse, partner, friend or any other household member.
3. If you are a victim of domestic violence, seek help immediately. There are many Indian organizations across the nation that can help in the situation. There are also local agencies in every community that help victims of domestic violence.

Parents & Visitors

1. Do not let the parents go unattended at least until they are fully familiar with the surroundings.
2. Do not let them walk alone in unsafe areas. Even if your neighborhood is safe, there will be a risk of intruders from other neighborhoods.
3. Make sure that they understand that they cannot pat or offer food to unknown children (and pets).
4. Make sure that they have health insurance. Even if they are going to visit you for a small period, having basic health insurance is prudent.

Children

1. Never leave infants unattended at home, outside or in your car.
2. Do not leave an infant unattended in your car, even if you are going into a shop, where you can see your child at few yards away. It is illegal in most of the states.
3. Never be violent to your children. You may get into serious trouble with the law and the children may be taken away from you.
4. Do not leave dangerous things within reach of your infant children.
5. Do not leave unlocked any alcohol or other substances that are not safe for children. Particularly be careful with your teen-age children.

Health, Life & Auto Insurance

1. Irrespective of your visa status, a good health Insurance is an essential part of your life as long as you stay in the United States. Healthcare is very expensive and in most cases unaffordable without insurance. There were numerous instances of students and temporary H-1, L1 visa workers getting into serious trouble by ignoring their health insurance.
2. Though you may seem to be healthy, you never know what could happen tomorrow. There were more than a dozen deaths of massive heart attacks of people under 35 years of age Indian community within the last six months.
3. A term life insurance is easily affordable for most people. People under 35 can get a \$100,000 term life insurance at a cost equaling to one or two restaurant bills. Such insurance at least keeps your beloved ones away from immediate financial troubles.

4. If you are part of an institution or company, please check if they have group life insurance and/or disability insurance plans for you to participate in. The group policies may cost you less. But, remember it covers you only as long as you are part of that group.
5. A decent automobile insurance is absolutely essential. Though the local state law mandates a minimum, it is always better to have some extra third party or umbrella coverage.

Banking, Wills & Emergency Contacts

1. When you open a bank account (either savings or checking), you usually have an option to choose a nominee/POD (payable up on death). That person need not be present at the bank. Make sure that you choose a family member or a friend that you can trust to be a nominee/POD. If something happens to you, at least your hard-earned money will be in safe custody and your family need not go through the hassle of probate courts.
2. Please have your identification information and your emergency contacts recorded on your cell phone and wallet. It may be recorded as ICE (In Case of Emergency) on your cell phone.
3. It is highly recommended that you have a will, regardless of your age, marital or financial status.

Taxes

Taxes are an unavoidable part of American life. Make sure that you understand the tax laws covering your situation and that you file your tax-returns appropriately and pay your taxes promptly.

Sports & Recreation

1. Do not try to participate in adventurous sports unless you have sufficient skills or prior experience.
2. If you are not proficient in swimming, do not get into the pools or ponds unless safety personnel are present. Even if you are an expert swimmer, do not attempt to swim in unknown waters or oceans. Nature is not always predictable.
3. If you are going to practice at any shooting ranges, or gun clubs, take necessary safety training first.
4. Wear safety jackets while participating in whitewater rafting, fishing, canoeing or any other recreational water sports.

5. Ensure that you have appropriate equipment and in good order for the sports that you are participating in.

Internet

1. Do not solicit or encourage any online sexual chats with unknown people. Lately, several people got in trouble with the sting operations by undercover cops.
2. Do not post any threatening or derogatory messages on web sites. They do not offer any benefit to you or the people around you. There are several cases of students getting into serious trouble because of their internet postings.
3. Protect your PCs from malicious virus and malware threats. Especially so, if you are using your PC for any banking or financial transactions. Many commonly visited Indian websites are prone to transmitting viruses and malware.

A little common sense and planning can help avert many of the catastrophes that can affect you and your family.

And, if something untoward happens, the many volunteers of TANA Emergency Assistance and Management Team (TEAM Square) are ready to assist you to the best of their capabilities.

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