

# What's Up, College Station Transcript

## (Season 4, Ep. 24)

**David Simmons:** 911 is for emergencies only. We're not going to penalize or arrest you for abuse of 911 if you call to report an alligator in the creek off Harvey Mitchell. We're going to respond. If we decide as officers to have that conversation, we can, but we probably won't. Kids also need to know what constitutes an emergency versus what does not. 911 is for emergencies only.

**Grace Hallowell:** What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today I'm joined once again by Officer David Simmons of the College Station Police Department. Welcome back.

**David Simmons:** Thank you.

**Grace Hallowell:** It is summertime, and large events are in full swing. We're getting ready for some upcoming city events, including the I Heart America celebration, which means this is a busy time for you. Today, we're going to share some summer safety tips. By now, our viewers and listeners know who you are and what you do, but give us a little refresher on the history of Officer David Simmons.

**David Simmons:** My name is David Simmons, and I have been with the College Station Police Department for the last nine years. Last week was actually my anniversary. I've grown up here my entire life. I'm originally from Bryan, but the two communities are very connected, so I spent a lot of time in College Station attending events. I've been married for 12 years and have two kids. We recently introduced a chocolate lab puppy into the mix, who has been the bane of my existence!

I serve as the Public Information Officer for the department. It is a rewarding position — not necessarily the most glamorous, but I truly enjoy it because I am from this area. My philosophy is: who better to tell the community what's going on than someone who is actually from the community?

**Grace Hallowell:** Absolutely. For those who may be unfamiliar, what does a Public Information Officer do? What are your core duties?

**David Simmons:** First and foremost is social media. I'm the one behind the keyboard or phone screen constantly taking pictures and creating posts. The three main pillars I try to focus on are recruiting, retention, and transparency. Transparency is probably my favorite because, in this day and age, we need to be transparent with our community. I also handle all incoming media requests, whether that involves providing basic information over the

phone and email or setting up interviews. Additionally, I respond to any critical incidents within our city that draw a large police presence.

**Grace Hallowell:** Yes, and that can happen at any time of day or night. You have your phone on you and are ready like Batman whenever the call comes in to put that information out there and keep our residents safe. What is one thing you wish more people knew about the College Station Police Department or public information in general?

**David Simmons:** Post-2020, there is a bit of a disconnect nationally between the public and police departments. However, I can say with full confidence that we do not fit that negative stigma. We are well-connected within our community, even with groups that may historically lack trust in law enforcement. We still show up every single time someone calls. We work diligently with local businesses, community members, and organizations like the City of College Station to host events. This brings in families who might not normally interact with the police, helping them feel more comfortable knowing we are the ones responding to their calls.

**Grace Hallowell:** Yes. Like you mentioned, you grew up here and love this community. Back in February, we did a series of interviews for Black History Month and spoke to former Officer Brad Smith, who also grew up here and served with CSPD. He talked about that exact same goal: building relationships and making connections so that if someone needs help, they aren't afraid to call.

**David Simmons:** Exactly.

**Grace Hallowell:** What is your favorite thing about your job? Your days are probably completely unpredictable, where you go in with a certain plan and it changes completely by 9:00 AM.

**David Simmons:** I love being a police officer. I won't lie, I do miss being out on the streets sometimes. But I've been in this specific PIO role for almost four years now, and it is highly rewarding. It is a position that can easily be overlooked, but the amount of training I've received and what I've been able to accomplish will take my resume a lot further once I hit my 20-year retirement mark than if I had strictly been a patrol cop for 20 years. I've been able to stand up and speak for victims, help solve cases by giving them a voice, and let our community know when we need their help. It has really paid off. Strengthening our relationships with media partners has also been great, as that can sometimes be a rocky road. Ultimately, putting on this uniform is my favorite part. There is a lot of honor in having my name attached to this badge.

**Grace Hallowell:** How is summer different from the rest of the year for a community like College Station?

**David Simmons:** Obviously, it's hot! For College Station specifically, a large portion of our student population leaves for the season. We enjoy the break, but the calls don't stop. Traffic crashes might decrease slightly, but they still happen. We also see a bit more suspicious activity simply because teenagers are out of school, bored, and occasionally surrounded by bad influences. No matter the season, the activity continues and we respond accordingly.

**Grace Hallowell:** What are some of the most common safety concerns you see during the summertime?

**David Simmons:** I might be stepping onto the fire department's toes a bit here, but hydration is a massive one. We host large events, like the recent international soccer match at Kyle Field, and people simply don't drink enough water. Pool safety is another major concern. Kids don't always know how to swim correctly, or parents neglect to use the life jackets provided at city pools. We actually put together a video segment highlighting pool safety tips because everyone wants to be in the water when it's this hot, whether it's a city facility or a residential pool. There are always safety risks to manage whether you are going to a pool, a park, or driving.

**Grace Hallowell:** What simple steps can residents take to protect themselves and their families this summer?

**David Simmons:** "See something, say something." Report suspicious activity. Keeping a keen eye on your surroundings and protecting your home and vehicle makes a massive difference.

**Grace Hallowell:** Yes. Our Neighborhood Services Department loves to talk about the importance of being a good neighbor. If you notice your neighbors are going out of town, or if you are traveling yourself, let a trusted neighbor know so they can keep an eye on your home and vehicle. If something looks out of place, definitely speak up.

**David Simmons:** Right. You won't get penalized if it turns out to be nothing; it is always better to be safe than sorry. This is a crucial point because we've noticed an influx of people using the Nextdoor app or online forums to report suspicious activity. Those platforms are not monitored by the police department. If you hear gunshots in a specific area, posting it online doesn't help us investigate. We need someone to pick up the phone and call. Our 911 dispatchers are ready, and our patrol officers are spread throughout the city ready to respond. Hopefully, it turns out to be nothing.

The same applies to package thieves. People are bored at home during the summer, doing a lot of Amazon shopping. If nobody reports suspicious vehicles driving through the neighborhood, we end up multiple steps behind the suspect.

**Grace Hallowell:** Right, residents provide far more sets of eyes across our neighborhoods than our limited number of police officers. Many residents travel during the summer. What are your top tips for keeping a home secure while away?

**David Simmons:** Lock your homes and double-check them. If you have push-button automatic locks, ensure the batteries are charged so they actually engage. Double-check your garage doors, back patios, and windows. We also highly encourage everyone to install security cameras, whether it's just a Ring doorbell or a full exterior system. We have solved a lot of cases strictly because camera footage allowed us to pinpoint what a suspect looked like, what they were wearing, and track their movements.

**Grace Hallowell:** Speaking of Amazon, it's hard to avoid it these days. I have an Amazon Blink security system with a doorbell camera and additional cameras at every exterior door, plus a few inside to spy on my cats! Having that backup peace of mind is incredibly helpful if you leave the house in a rush and can't remember if you locked up.

**David Simmons:** Absolutely. And going back to being a good neighbor, building those relationships is crucial. Your neighbors are the ones who will notice an unfamiliar vehicle sitting in your driveway while you're away.

**Grace Hallowell:** Yes. Even beyond vacation safety, if you're hosting a summer barbecue or a party, it's great to let your neighbors know ahead of time. Tell them to let you know if the music is too loud or invite them over to grab a plate. We can all agree that receiving a text from a neighbor is much better than having the police show up at your party.

**David Simmons:** It really is. Unfortunately, some people don't have great relationships with their neighbors, and we do get called out to disturbances. We will always come out and do our jobs, but if you're hosting a gathering, just keep the music at a reasonable volume. Make sure your guests park properly on the street without blocking sidewalks, fire hydrants, or neighbors' driveways. During the day, avoid blocking mailboxes so the post office can deliver the mail.

**Grace Hallowell:** Fire hydrants are an incredibly important one.

**David Simmons:** Definitely don't block those. The fire marshals or police officers will write you a ticket. It could be much worse if there is an actual structure fire nearby; the fire department will not waste time trying to find you to move your car—they will go right through it or tow it, and you will be stuck with the bill.

**Grace Hallowell:** What are some common mistakes that signal to criminals that a house is unoccupied for an extended period?

**David Simmons:** Leaving your blinds or shades wide open. Criminals will scout neighborhoods day or night. If they notice a dark house with no cars in the driveway and open blinds, they might drop someone off to walk around and peek inside. If it looks empty, they will check door handles. It is entirely a crime of opportunity. If the door is unlocked, they will go in and steal your belongings.

Another big mistake relates to shopping. If you buy a new TV or a PlayStation during summer sales, don't leave the large cardboard boxes sitting by the curb days in advance. Research bulk trash pickup days on the city website and wait until the night before or the morning of collection to put them out. Leaving a massive electronics box outside tells everyone exactly what valuable new items are sitting inside your home.

**Grace Hallowell:** That is an excellent tip. Shifting to digital security, how can social media posts unintentionally put someone's home at risk while they are away?

**David Simmons:** This often involves acquaintances or people you may know casually. If you are flashing a new piece of jewelry or an expensive purchase on social media, people who know where you live might target you. When I was on patrol, I worked a case where a resident had an extensive, highly valuable collection of Jordan shoes—he even kept a detailed spreadsheet binder of them. Someone he knew forced entry into his home while he was out and stole the entire collection. That's why we emphasize home security systems, door sensors, and cameras. Be mindful of how much you share online. Social media is great for sharing your life, but oversharing poses real safety risks.

**Grace Hallowell:** Absolutely. It's so important to know who you are actually accepting friend requests from. I always tell my younger cousins, nieces, and nephews that if they don't know the person in real life, do not accept the request. Keep your accounts private.

**David Simmons:** Unfortunately, social media is the driving force for the younger generation's communication and sense of acceptance, but it requires caution.

**Grace Hallowell:** What are the most common items reported stolen from vehicles?

**David Simmons:** Identifying information, credit cards, and debit cards. You need your driver's license with you, but you should never carry your Social Security card in your car or wallet. Keep those items locked in a fireproof safe in your home closet. Purses left in plain sight are another major target — even if it's a knockoff bag, a thief sees a purse and assumes there are valuables inside. The days of smashing a window just to steal a car stereo are mostly over; criminals are looking for quick, high-value items.

Firearms are another massive issue. It is incredibly frustrating for us as a department to continually take reports of firearms stolen from unlocked vehicles. Those guns often end

up directly in the hands of individuals who will use them to commit violent crimes. We aren't telling people they can't own firearms, but they must be stored responsibly. If you keep one in your vehicle, secure it in a bolted-down car safe, though our primary recommendation is to never leave a firearm in a vehicle overnight.

Lastly, families out shopping at the mall or visiting local parks often leave shopping bags exposed in the seats. Central Park experienced a string of smash-and-grab thefts back in April. That stood out because most local vehicle burglaries involve completely unlocked doors. Never leave your keys or fobs inside your vehicle either. With modern proximity keys and smartphone apps, people get complacent. If a thief finds your keys, your firearm, and your ID in the car, they are going to steal the vehicle itself. That stolen car could then be used in a chase, crashed into property, or injure someone. Please, lock your vehicles and take your keys.

**Grace Hallowell:** Make that mental checklist before you walk away from your car: phone, wallet, keys, and lock the door.

**David Simmons:** We always push the slogan: Lock, Take, Hide. Lock your vehicle, take your belongings, or hide them completely out of view.

**Grace Hallowell:** What should someone do if they discover their vehicle has been broken into?

**David Simmons:** Do not rummage through the car. Step back and call us immediately. Depending on weather conditions like humidity or condensation, pulling clean fingerprints can be tough, but we are always going to try. We have successfully linked suspects to broader crime sprees because an officer was able to lift a clean latent print from a vehicle. Our crime scene technicians are heavily tasked, so they can't respond to every single vehicle burglary, but patrol officers will investigate. Furthermore, if your car was targeted, chances are several others on your street were too. Reporting it prompts us to canvass the area for home security footage or utilize city street cameras to track down suspect vehicle descriptions and license plates.

**Grace Hallowell:** During the summer, more people are utilizing our city parks and trails. What personal safety tips do you recommend for outdoor recreation?

**David Simmons:** Be aware of your surroundings. Noise-canceling headphones are popular, but if you are out on a trail, keep the ambient noise feature turned on or leave one earbud out so you can hear what is happening around you. Additionally, know your route before you leave. Nature trails like the ones at Lick Creek Park are fantastic, but you need to understand the layout. We have incredible parks like Adamson Lagoon and Bachman Park, and residents should absolutely enjoy them safely.

**Grace Hallowell:** Yes, our Parks and Recreation Department provides excellent online trail maps and amenity guides so you can plan your visit before leaving the house. What safety conversations should parents have with their children before heading to local parks or pools?

**David Simmons:** For parks, parents need to emphasize the importance of not running off into secluded areas, staying aware of surroundings, and practicing "stranger danger." We live in a very safe community, but parents still need to remain vigilant. We urge parents to step away from their phones and actively supervise their children at playgrounds and pools. We frequently get calls for missing children because a parent got distracted chatting with another adult and the child wandered into the woods. Keep a close eye on them and establish clear boundaries.

**Grace Hallowell:** What should older kids and teenagers keep in mind as they spend unsupervised time with friends during summer break?

**David Simmons:** We want teenagers to have fun and enjoy their break; we were all teenagers once. But even when pushing boundaries, youth need to maintain smart limits. Illegal drugs and underage drinking are present in any city, and we work diligently to combat them. We don't want kids drinking, vaping, or driving under the influence. Just this morning, we responded to a call at a local park regarding teens suspected of narcotics activity. They fled from officers when we arrived, but because we have encountered them before, we know who they are and they will be dealt with according to the law. It is entirely possible to have a great summer while staying within legal and safe boundaries. Keep your parents informed of where you are going and who you are with.

**Grace Hallowell:** If a teen sees their friends making an unsafe choice, they should speak up to a parent, teacher, or trusted adult. There is no harm in reporting something dangerous. How can residents become more active partners in keeping their neighborhoods safe?

**David Simmons:** It starts right on your street. A vast majority of College Station neighborhoods are connected via Facebook groups or Nextdoor. Use those platforms to share community info but ensure that actual suspicious activity is directed to the police department rather than just posted online. We would always prefer to come out and check on something that turns out to be nothing than to miss a critical window on an actual crime.

**Grace Hallowell:** For those who may not know, when should someone utilize 911 versus the non-emergency dispatch line?

**David Simmons:** 911 is strictly for life-safety emergencies and crimes in progress. As I mentioned earlier, you will not get arrested for abusing 911 if you genuinely feel unsafe, but non-emergencies should go to our standard line at 979-764-3600. Non-emergency situations include reporting past-occurred minor accidents, online scams, reporting delayed suspicious activity, or municipal nuisances.

**Grace Hollowell:** How can residents stay up to date on safety alerts or community updates from CSPD?

**David Simmons:** Follow our official Facebook and Instagram accounts at @cstxpolice. I am constantly updating those pages with safety tips, public service announcements, and active road closures due to construction or traffic accidents. Following our direct accounts ensures you are getting accurate, timely information straight from the source.

**Grace Hollowell:** If residents are looking for more comprehensive information outside of social media, where should they look?

**David Simmons:** Visit our city website at [cstx.gov/police](http://cstx.gov/police). It features resources for all of our different divisions, information on how to obtain special event permits, updates from our Community Enhancement Unit, and an event calendar.

**Grace Hollowell:** Before we wrap up, we have a quick lightning round of fun questions. Are you ready?

**David Simmons:** I'm ready, let's do it.

**Grace Hollowell:** Summer music festival or a major sporting event?

**David Simmons:** Music festival.

**Grace Hollowell:** One safety concept every parent should teach their child?

**David Simmons:** Stranger danger.

**Grace Hollowell:** Your most important safety tip in five words or less?

**David Simmons:** Lock. Take. Hide.

**Grace Hollowell:** One essential safety item every driver should keep in their vehicle?

**David Simmons:** A first-aid kit.

**Grace Hollowell:** Finally, your favorite part about serving the College Station community?

**David Simmons:** Absolutely everything. I love this city.

**Grace Hallowell:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for sitting down with me today, Officer Simmons.

**David Simmons:** Thank you for having me.

**Grace Hallowell:** And that's what's up!