



Together for Safety

General guidelines for parents
of children aged **12-17 years**



missing children's
network
Keeping hope alive

Founded in 1985, the Missing Children's Network provides front-line services to families who are searching for their missing child. Our staff supports and counsels these families and works collaboratively with law enforcement agencies, child welfare organizations, as well as the media.



In addition, the Missing Children's Network offers comprehensive educational and prevention programs tailored for children, parents and professionals.



Please visit our website at:
www.missingchildrensnetwork.ngo
or contact us at: 514 843-4333



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HELP TEENS GAIN A SENSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Spend quality time every day with your teen by engaging in activities that suit his age and interests – remember to use this time for conversation and not for confrontation. Shared experiences (meal times, going shopping together, etc.) help to build experiences of trust and respect that form the basis for open communication.

- Your teen will learn that you are available to listen either when he is having a problem or when things are going well;
- Model the type of behaviour you expect from your teen. If you want honest expressions of feelings, you must be prepared to do the same;
- Use active listening with your teenager. Pay careful attention to the emotion behind the message and try to determine what your teen is saying by rephrasing it in your own words;
- Encourage your teen to succeed and help him to work through his differences and struggles;
- Create opportunities for your teen to learn how to make positive decisions about his life;
- Protect your teen from feelings of loneliness and isolation;
- Defend your teen against harassment or feelings of loneliness or verbal abuse;
- Offer praise for tasks well done and if your teens falls short, suggest positive ways in which to improve – make sure you don't criticize his behaviour;
- Set realistic boundaries and be consistent in applying them.

ADOLESCENCE ... A PERIOD OF TRANSITION DURING WHICH YOUR YOUNGSTER DEVELOPS FROM A CHILD INTO AN ADULT

Make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your teen's needs. Encourage your teen to share any secrets that may leave him feeling uncomfortable or scared. Find daily opportunities to talk with your child and listen attentively to what he has to say.

It is crucial that children feel that the significant adults in their lives accept them, care about them and would go out of their way to ensure that they are safe and well. Children with a healthy sense of self-esteem are less vulnerable to becoming victims of abduction, aggression or exploitation.

FUNDAMENTAL RULES TO HELP ENSURE YOUR TEEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Encourage your teen to always trust his internal alarm system, which lets him know when he has a bad feeling or feels uncomfortable, embarrassed or scared. Remind him that when his alarm system is triggered, he always has the right to say NO! even to a family member or close friend.

THE SAFETY EQUATION

Teach your teen to ask himself the following 3 questions that will help him to make safe decisions in any situation:

- DO I HAVE A GOOD FEELING? ► ALARM SYSTEM**
- WILL MY PARENTS KNOW WHERE I AM? ► ASKING FOR PERMISSION**
- WILL I BE ABLE TO FIND HELP IF I NEED IT? ► BUDDY SYSTEM**

If he answers NO! to any one of these 3 questions, he must say NO! and discuss the situation with you or a safe adult: **Remember 1 no = don't go!**

RESPECT YOUR BODY

All children have the right to reject any unwanted and inappropriate attention such as teasing, touching and bullying. Instruct your teen to be assertive, say NO! and then to talk to a safe adult about the incident. Remind your teen that he is not at fault for what just happened.

BUDDY SYSTEM

Teach your teen to always be in the company of at least one friend whenever he goes anywhere. There is safety in numbers.





ALWAYS TELL AN ADULT WHERE YOU ARE GOING

- Your teen must always advise you before going anywhere, following someone, getting into a car or accepting a gift, even from a family member or a close friend. Explain to him that it is important that you always know where he is, who he is with and what he is doing in order to provide him with help in case of an emergency. If your teen ever finds himself in risky situations or in trouble, his family and friends will know where to begin looking for him;
- Establish an information/message centre in your house where you and your teen can leave notes detailing where everyone is and when they will return;
- Make sure your teen knows how to reach you at all times;
- If there is any change of plans, your teen must immediately notify you.

APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING

If it seems too good to be true ... then it probably is! Before accepting any kind of offer, whether a new job, an exciting opportunity, etc., make sure your teen understands that he must first discuss the details with a parent or safe adult.

ONLINE SAFETY

The Internet has entered the lives of children and youth at a rapid rate. At the touch of the finger, it has opened up the world to them.

Even though the value of the Internet is unparalleled, it also has the potential for children to be victimized and, on occasion, seriously harmed. As children grow older, they need safety messages that will help them navigate the world with less adult supervision. The tips that follow will help you achieve your objective of keeping your teens safe:



- Create a list of Internet house rules with input from your children;
- Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area where you can easily monitor them;
- Encourage your children to come to you if they come across anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened;
- Consider Internet-filtering tools as a complement – not a replacement for parental supervision;
- Talk with your children about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities;
- Social networking sites are popular places these days for teens to network and communicate with friends. To ensure their safety, as well as protect your family's privacy, you must teach your teen to exercise caution. Even though it may appear that teens can handle certain situations as they get older, they actually still require and unconsciously seek adult guidance, supervision and ultimately, approval;
- Work with your teen to create a profile that can be safely posted online. Check his profile page on a DAILY basis. You can get an alert on your home page when he adds new friends or applications;
- Emphasize to your teen the public nature of the Internet, the permanence of sent images, the legal implications of distributing sexually explicit images and the disruption it may cause in his life;

- Be aware that information your teens give out in blogs could possibly put them at a higher risk of victimization. People looking to harm them can use the information posted to gain their trust. They can deceive the teen by pretending to know him;
- Teach your children responsible online behaviour. File-sharing and taking text, images or artwork from the Internet may infringe on copyright laws;
- Talk to them about ethical behaviour. They should not be using the Internet to spread gossip, bully or make threats against others;
- Remind them that the Internet is a public domain and that they should be very cautious when exchanging private information, photos and videos on any of the social networks;
- Discuss the concept of anonymity on the Internet as people can pretend to be anyone. Before agreeing to meet a cyber-friend, be sure your teen understands the importance of always telling you or a safe adult where he is going and who he is going to meet;
- Instruct your teen to immediately report any sexually explicit material that he encounters to www.cybertip.ca;
- Keep the lines of communication open with your teen and make sure he always feel comfortable coming to you when something doesn't feel right;
- Facebook requires everyone to be at least 13 years old before they can create an account.

WHETHER ON-OR-OFFLINE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SAFETY MESSAGES FOR CHILDREN IS TO ALWAYS TELL A SAFE ADULT. CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW THEY CAN TALK TO YOU ABOUT ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS.

ALWAYS HAVE PROPER IDENTIFICATION OF YOUR TEEN

Always carry proper identification of your teen that includes a current colour photograph, as well as complete physical description (hair and eye colour, height, weight, date of birth, and any specific physical attributes). Keep a list of all of your teen's friends, including their phone numbers.



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