

Keep Kids Safe

When it comes to keeping teenagers safe, the best lines of defense are information and communication. The more you talk together, the better chance you'll have of knowing who your teen is with and what he's up to.

Here are some important safety tips—along with facts you can use to grab your child's attention and start discussions.



Drugs and alcohol

Attention grabber: Using drugs or alcohol can be humiliating—or fatal.

Drugs and alcohol cause poor judgment and slow reactions. This makes users more likely to say something embarrassing or do something harmful (drive drunk and cause an accident, for example). Tell your teen he isn't allowed to drink or do drugs.

Ways to stay safe:

■ When your child attends a party, be sure the host's parents are home. Or encourage your teen to have kids at your house instead. Get pizza, let them play the music loud, and peek in frequently to see that everyone is safe. *Note:* Be sure your child tells his friends they can't bring drugs or alcohol to his house. If you suspect anything, you may have to check water bottles or bags they bring in.

■ Learn drug lingo. Visit www.nida.nih.gov/drugpages.html or www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/streetterms, and click on any drug to become familiar with street names used to describe it. For example, "420" means it's time to smoke marijuana, and "007s" refers to ecstasy. If you hear your teen or his friends saying these terms, ask him flat out if he's using drugs. If he says no, be on the lookout for other evidence (red eyes, dropping grades, slurred speech).



■ Pay attention to over-the-counter drugs. Some teens abuse cold and cough medicines, diet aids, sleeping pills, and motion-sickness remedies. Be sure your child uses medication only when he's really sick. Also, watch for his buying these products or for household medicine disappearing.

Note: If you suspect drug or alcohol abuse, talk to your high schooler's doctor or guidance counselor right away.

Internet use

Attention grabber: What you post or say online can determine whether you get into a college, land a job, or stay on a sports team.

Colleges, employers, and coaches check MySpace, Facebook, and other social-networking Web sites to see how teens present themselves. Revealing photos and crude language can make them question whether your high schooler is the best match for them.

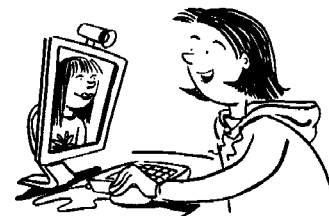
Ways to stay safe:

■ Consider creating your own MySpace or Facebook profile.

Although many teens consider these sites to be their territory, more adults are using them for social and professional networking. "Friend" your teen so you can see her profile and communicate with her online.

■ Tell your child not to include questionable content or personal information in her profiles or blogs. Mentioning her workplace, hangouts, and schedules could help a stranger find her. Instead, she should be vague and mark sites "private." Install filtering software, such as Bsafe Online (www.bsafehome.com).

■ Ask your teen regularly if she has been approached online by strangers. If anyone has sent obscene images or tried to talk about sex, report the abuse to the CyberTipline (800-843-5678 or www.cybertipline.org).

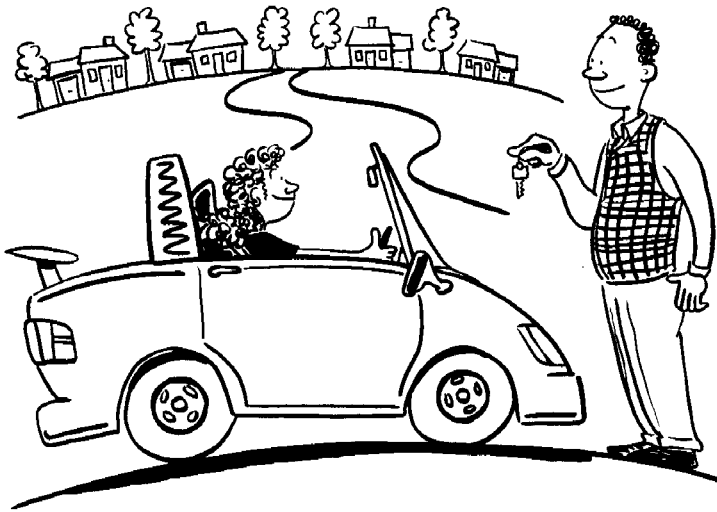


Driving

Attention grabber: Driving safely prevents accidents—and saves money.

Speeding or goofing off while driving leads to crashes. Tell your child she could be seriously hurt—or killed—or that she could seriously hurt or kill someone else. Even if nobody gets hurt, accidents are expensive. You can hold your teen accountable by telling her she'll have to pay for her own tickets, car repairs, and insurance.

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Ways to stay safe:

- Your teen should limit distractions by not talking or texting on her phone while driving. Have her keep the radio off or at a low volume, and consider limiting the number of friends in the car. Also, insist that she not eat, put on makeup, or do anything else while driving.
- When your teenager first gets her license, have her drive only during the day and stay close to home. You can increase the distance and add nighttime driving as she gains experience.
- If another driver yells or gestures at your teen, she should close the windows, lock the doors, and avoid eye contact. She can steer clear of road rage by obeying laws (signaling, yielding right-of-way, not tailgating).

Bullying

Attention grabber: *Bullying can be dangerous for everyone, including victims, bullies, and innocent bystanders.*



Bullying has serious consequences for victims, including loss of confidence, poor performance in school, and depression. For bullies, this behavior can lead to dropping out of school and even criminal behavior.

Ways to stay safe:

- Your child should report bullying to parents and teachers. Let her know that a person doesn't have to be beaten up to be a victim. Bullies make fun of others, destroy their possessions, or purposely exclude them from cafeteria tables or social activities.
- Bullies want a reaction, so your teen should try not to get upset or be sarcastic. Instead, she can say something like, "That's just a rumor—it isn't true," and walk away to find an adult.

- Tell your teen not to respond to "cyberbullying." tell her she should block the person so she can't be contacted again. Report online incidents such as threats or name-calling to the Web site or IM service.

Dating

Attention grabber: *Want to keep me from "grilling" your date?*

Go over rules before your teen's date arrives. Discuss who they'll be with, where they're going, and what time you expect them to return. The information will help put you at ease and cut down on questions when you meet the date.



Ways to stay safe:

- Suggest fun dates that take place in public (miniature golf, zoo). Or let your high schooler invite his date to your home so you can get to know her—offer to have a cookout, make fondue, or rent a movie.
- Discuss the need for respect. Teens shouldn't put each other down, act jealous, or push for sexual activity. Teach your child to be respectful and to expect respect in return.
- Set an earlier curfew for one-on-one dates than for group activities. Drive younger teens to social events, and return to pick them up. You will minimize the time alone and the opportunity for peer pressure.

Conflict resolution

Attention grabber: *"Saving face" can mean refusing to fight.*

Many kids think they have no choice but to fight when confronted. They don't want to look like they're chicken. The reality is, teens show they're more mature when they solve problems peacefully.

Ways to stay safe:

- Teach conflict-resolution skills. If your child is upset by a confrontation, encourage him to handle it with a cool head. He should talk to the other person and work together to come up with ways to resolve the problem.
- Explain the consequences of fighting to your teen. Many schools have zero-tolerance policies that require all parties in a fight to be suspended or even expelled. Discuss ways to handle the temptation to use fists (try humor to calm a flaring temper, avoid a student he frequently clashes with).
- Suggest using a peer mediator—a student who helps others reach agreements. If your child's school doesn't offer this program, he might suggest starting one. He'll get valuable problem-solving experience that can help him now and for years to come.

High School Years