

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

(Ages 13-17)

It is important to talk to teens about safety in a manner that respects their independence while establishing boundaries. This discussion guide offers age-appropriate messages about personal and online safety you can use to start a conversation.



Encourage your teens to have regular conversations about their lives with you or another trusted adult. Teens should know they can **count on your support** no matter how difficult the situation.

## What to Talk About

When talking about **personal safety**, focus on messages that help teens protect themselves when without adult supervision. Talk to teens about:

- Looking out for themselves and their friends by staying together when going places.
- Checking in with you or the adult in charge before changing plans.
- Not accepting rides or gifts without your permission — even if they are from casual acquaintances.
- Saying “no” to anyone who tries to pressure them into unwanted activities such as drugs, alcohol or sex. Remind teens that a trustworthy friend or adult will not pressure them into doing anything dangerous or inappropriate.

When talking about **online safety**, focus on messages that help teens understand how their actions online can affect them offline. Talk to teens about:

- What information is OK and not OK to share online. Help them understand how inappropriate comments and images may negatively affect academic and employment opportunities.
- Not sharing nude images or “sexting.” Remind teens to not send, ask for or forward sexts.
- Creating positive online environments by standing up for peers who are being cyberbullied. Instead of joining in, teens should report cyberbullying to the website on which it occurs and tell their trusted adults.
- Not pressuring their peers to take part in cyberbullying, sexting or other inappropriate behaviors online.
- Reporting anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable, asks for or shows them revealing photos, or asks to meet offline. Help your teen report to [www.CyberTipline.com](http://www.CyberTipline.com)

## How to Talk About It

**Don't exaggerate.** Teens may dismiss you and the risks. Help them understand your concerns and how your family rules are meant to keep them safer.

**Set boundaries.** Be clear with teens about your family's safety rules and the consequences of breaking them.

**Keep calm.** Teens make mistakes. If they break a safety rule, remind them why you set it and enforce the consequences. Discuss what they should do differently next time.

**Don't skip the hard stuff.** It can be hard to talk about some safety issues, especially those involving sex. But keeping quiet about them may make it difficult for your teen to talk to you if a problem arises.

**Listen.** Encourage your teens to talk about their concerns and listen respectfully — even when you disagree.

**Talk often.** It's important to remind teens of your safety rules — and the reasons you set them — on a regular basis. The more often you have these conversations with your teens, the easier it will become.

## TEACHABLE MOMENTS

The following stories demonstrate how you can incorporate the safety tips into real-life interactions with your teens.

### Check first

Andrew's 14-old daughter Mya went to the mall with friends after school, but she didn't ask her parents for permission. When Mya arrives home, Andrew talks to her about why this is dangerous. "Your mother and I were expecting you home at a certain time. When you weren't here, we became very worried. It's not fair to leave us wondering where you are. You should talk to us about changing plans. Because you broke one of our family safety rules, you are grounded. Next time, please ask for permission before changing plans."

### Sexting

Shelby has just returned home after attending an emergency parents' meeting at her 16-year-old son Chris's school. A nude picture of a female student is being shared around the school via cell phone. Chris is not involved in the situation, but Shelby knows that it is still important to talk to him about it. She tells her son, "Sexting photos can cause a lot of trouble for teens. You shouldn't ask anyone to send them to you or to anyone else, even as a joke. If someone does send one to you, don't forward it and tell me about it right away."

You don't have to wait for a real-life situation to arise before discussing safety with your teens. Start talking to them about it right now by creating your own teachable moments.

## GET STARTED

### When teens are online or texting, ask

"Are you being careful about the comments and images you share?"

### If a news story about personal safety arises, ask

"What safety rules may have helped in this situation?"

### While reviewing teens' social media pages with them, ask

"What do you think your posts say about you?"



To learn more about child safety, visit [BeHereForKids.org](http://BeHereForKids.org)