



Diocese of Steubenville
Safe Environment Program

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO PROTECT THEIR TEENS?

Ten action steps for keeping teens safe.

- 1. Spend time** with your son or daughter; develop **open** and **honest** lines of communication.

Many argue that the greatest defense against abuse is the healthy relationship between parent and child itself. This not only applies to children; it also applies to teens as well. Information is not enough. Teens need the ongoing guidance of their parents to assimilate and apply the information they have learned, as well as to process and deal with the various situations they will encounter in their lives.

- 2. Teach** them that they are **loved by God**, have infinite value, and they deserve to be respected. **Model respect** in the way you speak and act. Visibly live out your faith.

The greatest gift you can give your son or daughter is a healthy relationship with God, rooted in the firm conviction that He loves them unconditionally. Nothing will sustain them more through the trials of life. It's important to talk to them about God's love. And it's even more important for them to witness your own faith by how you live. So, go to Mass, receive the Sacraments, and practice Catholic morality. You should be able to say to your teenagers: follow my example!¹

- 3.** Be clear about your expectations for their behavior. Communicate **safety rules** and **moral rules** that you want them to follow.

*Don't simply rely on safety programs or classroom lessons. Parents need to clearly articulate the expectations they have for their teens. Explain to your son or daughter the choices that you want them to make and **why**. Help them to see that following the moral rules of the Church will help them to preserve their safety and avoid many of the pitfalls and heartaches that young people suffer in our culture.*

- 4.** Use **"teachable moments"** to reinforce and apply safety rules.

Life is full of opportunities to teach about health, safety and morality. Take passing opportunities to challenge your son or daughter to apply your safety rules. Present them with different scenarios and ask them what choices they would make. They may complain about this, but it will help them to assimilate these important lessons.

- 5. Talk** to your son or daughter about the choices they face day to day. Offer them **guidance** as they try to make various decisions. Help them to **process** their thoughts and feelings.

As much as they don't want to admit it, teens need their parents. You may think they are not listening to you, but your guidance plays a tremendous role in your teen's self-image, and in the choices they make. It's especially important to offer your guidance in love, patience and respect.

¹ Living your faith is not only good for your soul, it's also has many other positive benefits. Research studies have shown an astonishing number of positive effects of religious practice. Visit www.marri.us and search for "religious practice" to learn more.

- 6. Listen** to your teenager. **Pay attention** to their behaviors and attitudes. Be vigilant about anything suspicious that might point to a problem.

Abuse and unhealthy behaviors often stay hidden for quite some time. For example, in the vast majority of sexual abuse cases, the sexual offender is not a stranger, but rather someone who is known to the victim and the victim's family. And whether the offender is a family friend, a relative, a teacher, or some other person, they often will try many tactics (including lies, manipulation, and force) to keep the abuse secret. Parents need to be vigilant.

- 7. Be involved** in your teen's life. Know their teachers, coaches, and other adults that work with them. Know their friends. Know where they spend their time. Be vigilant and cautious about the people in their lives, without being paranoid or overbearing.

Let's face it: teenagers often will make foolish mistakes. They will put themselves in situations where they can get hurt. And they can often be deceived by people that want to manipulate, use and hurt them. When it comes to safety, there is no substitute for the careful vigilance of loving parents.

- 8. Be vigilant with your teen's media use.** Be sure they know safety rules for using the internet, texting, social networking, playing video games, etc.

*The tools, devices, and services for media use have increased dramatically in recent years. While this is positive in many ways, these new methods of getting connected also pose many new threats, especially for youth. Statistics about exposure to pornography, outright sexual solicitation and cyberbullying demonstrate the need to be vigilant.² The reality is that **the internet is the biggest threat facing your son or daughter right now – and the access they have to the internet is staggering.** Parents need to be educated and vigilant when it comes to internet safety.*

*The good news is that **great resources are available for parents.** Netsmartz.org is an excellent source to become familiar with the risks associated with various media devices and sources, as well as the steps parents can take to ensure the safety of their children.*

*One danger that is often overlooked by parents is **video games.** Video and computer games are everywhere. Many of them involve innocent entertainment and learning. But a great number (and more than you might think) involve **extremely graphic displays of violence and sexuality.** In many of the most popular games the players are often encouraged (and even rewarded in the game) for brutal displays of violence, even sexual violence. Parents are strongly encouraged to learn about the dangers of video games and monitor their teen's exposure to them. *Plugged In* (www.pluggedin.com) is excellent source for reviews from a Christian perspective of a great variety of games, movies, music and more.*

- 9. Don't be afraid to ask for help** when you need it! Teach your son or daughter that it's okay to ask for help.

- 10. Don't forget to pray!**

*Pray alone. Pray with your spouse. And be sure to **pray together as a family!** Ask the Lord to protect your son or daughter. Ask Him to strengthen your faith and the faith of your family. Ask Him to teach you to be a good parent, and to make your marriage and family healthy and holy. **Don't underestimate the power of God's grace!***

*Keep in mind: **"The family that prays together stays together."** (Fr. Patrick Payten)*

² <http://www.internetsafety101.org/Pornographystatistics.htm>