
PERSONAL SAFETY

Personal safety is an important part of our daily lives. Staying safe isn't really a separate "issue," it's just part of everything we do. When we're at home or at work, going to school, hanging out with friends, driving a car, or on a date—we're constantly making choices that affect how safe we will be. That's why you'll find information about ways to stay safe in many sections of this book, for example:

- Protecting yourself from **AIDS**, page 1
- Avoiding **ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS**, page 3
- Taking a stand against **BULLYING**, page 7
- Preventing **DATE RAPE**, page 51
- Recognizing **DEPRESSION**, page 12
- Resisting **GANGS**, page 17
- Staying on the right side of **THE LAW**, page 24
- Forming safe **RELATIONSHIPS**, page 44
- Help when you feel like **RUNNING AWAY**, page 45
- Recovering from **SEXUAL ABUSE**, page 47
- Preventing **SEXUAL ASSAULT OR RAPE**, page 51
- Protecting yourself from **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES**, page 53
- Practicing smart **SOCIAL NETWORKING**, page 56
- Preventing **SUICIDE**, page 61

Modern life presents some additional worries, that no one used to give much thought. For example, staying safe on the internet. Internet searching, chatting, instant messaging, buying online, are all fairly new ways to get ourselves into dangerous situations. Millions of people go online every day, without ever being victimized. But the smart person **ALWAYS** takes care on the internet. Here's how:

Internet Safety Tips for Teens*

- ☒ **Remember** - A million times before you've heard that honesty is the best policy. Most people don't believe that, though. So when you're out there in cyberspace, watch yourself. You never know when 5' 6", blond and female could actually mean 6' 3", hairy and male. Don't believe everything you see online.
- ☒ Be leery of those who want to know too much. There's no rule that says you have to tell them where you live, what your last name is, or anything else personal. Your business is your business. Let them stick to theirs. And trust your instincts. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, leave.
- ☒ We all remember the "buddy system" from kindergarten. Sure, you're no longer in kindergarten, but the system still works. If you're planning on meeting up with somebody you met online, bring a friend, or even your parents, along with you and encourage your online acquaintance to bring theirs, too. It sounds stupid, but it's definitely the smart idea. At the very least, make sure your real friends know what you're doing.
- ☒ Before you take a running leap at the streets and a hard-knock life, let somebody know how you're feeling. Try talking to an understanding relative or friend, or call the National Runaway Switchboard at (800) 786-2929. They are a better, more trustworthy resource than a stranger in a chat room.

<p>* Safety Tips for Teens are reproduced here with permission from the author, the Internet Education Foundation. For more information, log on to their website at www.getnetwise.org.</p>

☒ If you get suspicious emails, files, or pictures from someone you don't know and trust, trash them just like any other junk mail. You could have a lot to lose by trusting someone you've never even met. The same goes for clicking links or URLs that look suspicious - just don't do it.

☒ Avoid chat rooms or discussion areas that look sketchy or provocative, and don't let people online trick you into thinking of them as real-life friends if you've never met them in person. Just the same, don't let people goad you into online fights. If you go looking for trouble on the Internet, you'll find it, and things can get out of control really fast.

You even need to be careful on so-called "social networking sites" (like **Myspace** and **Facebook**.) They make you feel like you're among friends--but the whole world wide web is watching! Don't underestimate how far-reaching these sites are. Remember to **respect your privacy**, and the privacy of **your friends and acquaintances**, whenever you post personal information online.

For more information about SOCIAL NETWORKING, see page 56.

Additional information is available online at:

<http://kids.getnetwise.org/>, www.safeteens.com, and www.connectsafely.org

"Rules for Life"*

Most people don't lurk on the internet planning to harm young people; most people you meet in "real" life won't harm you, either. It doesn't make sense to fear everyone you meet. It DOES make sense to avoid people who approach you at school, or where you work, live, worship or play, if they make you feel uncomfortable in ANY WAY. But according to The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, fearing strangers isn't the best way for you to stay safe. Instead, try always to remember this:

*You're smart. You're strong. You know what's going on.
You know that, in real life, there are rules to live by.
Rules that remind you, like a little voice inside you that says
"Hey, do I really want to do this?" "Do I really want to go there?"*

These are your rules for life.

- 1. Don't go out alone.**
- 2. Always tell an adult where you're going.**
- 3. It's YOUR body.**
- 4. Say NO if you feel threatened, and tell a trusted adult.**

These rules are pretty BASIC, pretty common sense. Yeah, yeah, you've heard them a million times, but have you ever really LISTENED to them? Have you ever really thought about what they mean?

DON'T GO OUT ALONE. THINK ABOUT IT before you go. Remember that if you can avoid situations that put you at risk in the first place, you're already one step ahead.

* **Rules for Life** are reprinted here with permission from **The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**, www.missingkids.com.

ALWAYS TELL AN ADULT WHERE YOU'RE GOING. THINK ABOUT IT. Never Ever go somewhere with someone you don't know. This includes hitching rides. This includes babysitting for anyone without getting information about the family like where they live and even some references about them FIRST. Leave a telephone number and an address with your family BEFORE you go.

IT'S YOUR BODY. You're constantly having to make decisions about yourself and are faced with peer pressure about anything from who your friends are to exposure to drugs and sex. One more time: THINK ABOUT IT.

SAY NO IF YOU FEEL THREATENED, AND TELL A TRUSTED ADULT. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. Listen to your intuition and follow your best judgment. If your friends are making bad decisions, you don't have to. Have the confidence to say NO if ANYONE makes you feel uncomfortable about ANYTHING. And remember, it's never too late for you to tell an adult if something is bothering you.

Now you know the rules. You may have always known them, but now you can really **get** them. They're like bells that go off in your head when you're faced with a risky situation. They can't get you out of every tough spot, but they might keep you from getting into one.

Missing Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children tells us that the largest number of missing children are "runaways"; followed by "family abductions"; then "lost, injured, or otherwise missing children"; and finally, the smallest category, but the one in which someone is at greatest risk of injury or death, "nonfamily abductions." In the event that a young person goes missing, under any circumstances, it may be helpful for the family to have identifying information to help deploy law enforcement, the media, and the Amber Alert System as soon as possible. Two local programs that help make this possible are:

SafeAssured ID Program www.safeassured-id.com
Offers families a record of key information about their relative that police could use if the relative were lost or kidnapped. Participants receive a miniature compact disk that has digital fingerprint scans, a physical description, audio and video recordings of the relative, and other identifying information. Check the "Event Locations" page at the SafeAssured ID website and scroll down to Wisconsin.

Secure ID (877) 704-0233
Prints computer-generated identification cards that parents can carry in case their children are ever reported missing. Cards contain the child's photo, thumbprint, name, height, weight, date of birth, hair and eye color, and their parents' names and address.

Wausau Police (715-261-7800) and Everest Police (715-359-4202) both offer child identification programs for parents to record and keep identifiable information of their children, should the information become needed.

For more information about staying safe, log on to **The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children** website: www.missingkids.com.