

# Personal Safety & Healthy Child Development

The purpose of this sheet is to provide parents and educators with background information on child development and personal safety that will help with making important decisions in the best interest of children's personal safety.

## The Growing Personality

### Children 13 to 15 years of age...

- » Feel as though acceptance and belonging are the most important thing.
  - » Are extremely influenced by peers and their behaviour.
  - » Have a "pseudo-maturity" and feel they can handle more than they are ready for developmentally (i.e. they feel invincible at times).
  - » Are extremely sensitive and easily humiliated (i.e. are extremely sensitive to social judgment).
  - » Would rather act shamelessly in front of adults, out of free choice, than be forced into activities which would embarrass them in front of their peers.
  - » How they look and what others think of them can be the most important thing to them.
  - » Are vulnerable to those who offer insincere flattery.
  - » Separate from parents to form their own identity.
  - » Test the loyalty of friendship through conflict.
  - » Compare themselves to peers in an effort to define themselves.
  - » Take huge emotional risks in search of their identity.
  - » Will change the truth to avoid social judgment.
  - » Have hormonal changes that affect their mood.
  - » Their action may be guided by what feels right in the moment.
  - » May become rebellious and explore with minor delinquency.
  - » Experience a change in sleep patterns. They stay up later and sleep in longer.
  - » May experiment with drugs and alcohol.
- » May explore sexuality.
  - » Demand privacy.
  - » Misreading adult emotions is common. They often confuse an adult's sadness with anger.
  - » Focus on whether their behaviour conforms to the behaviour of others, not whether it is right or wrong.
  - » Will be motivated to maintain appropriate behaviour if they believe they are being monitored by an adult.
  - » Are more reactive and affected by stress than adults are.

## What do 13- to 15-year-old adolescents want to do?

- » Use instant messaging, email, write weblogs, etc. to communicate with others.
- » Play online games with opponents.
- » Use webcams and digital cameras to take and send photos and videos.
- » Use cell phones (i.e. talking to friends, web surfing, taking photos, text messaging, etc.).
- » Use peer to peer programs to download music, games and videos (e.g. Limewire™, µTorrent®).
- » Create personal pages on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook®, MySpace®, Twitter®, etc.).
- » Will use YouTube® to post and watch videos.
- » Confide in friends online and offline.
- » Expect privacy and want more independence.
- » Explore neighbourhoods with friends (by bike, skateboard, scooter, walking, etc.).
- » May consider running away.

- » Babysit.
- » Make their own money (employment).
- » Volunteer.
- » Start dating.
- » Go to movies, concerts, carnivals, and shop with friends.
- » Go to sleepovers.
- » Attend mixed gender parties.
- » Increase their time spent doing extra-curricular activities.
- » Could engage in self-destructive behaviour, such as taking drugs or alcohol to deal with stress.

## Things to Consider

- » Use parental controls on your computer.
- » Reinforce the public nature of the Internet and set the expectation that you will monitor their online activity.
- » Monitor increased independence. Even though adolescents can appear as though they can handle things, they actually require and unconsciously seek adult guidance and supervision.
- » Explain where it is appropriate for them to have privacy — confiding in close friends face-to-face, writing in a journal, private space in their bedroom, etc. There is no privacy on the Internet.
- » Keep an eye on who they are communicating with online and offline.
- » Discuss risks associated with peer-to-peer file sharing programs (used to download music and games) as they may be exposed to sexually explicit material.
- » Monitor use of webcams, cell phones, and the posting and exchanging of pictures online.
- » Explain that once a picture is sent online they lose control of what is done with it. It may never be completely removed from the Internet.
- » Reinforce that they must be careful with whom they share their personal information as someone could use it to humiliate them or try to manipulate them into sending pictures.
- » Teach them that it is illegal for people to manufacture, possess or distribute naked or sexually explicit pictures of children under 18 years of age. They need to tell a *safe adult* if they are presented with this situation.
- » Reinforce the importance of protecting their friends' and family's personal information and pictures. This should apply even when they are upset with people.
- » Encourage them to be leaders and not to forward messages or pictures of others that they receive.
- » Teach them that it is illegal for adults to offer gifts or money in exchange for sexual pictures.
- » Explain to adolescents that it is illegal to threaten someone online or offline. If someone threatens them, they need to tell a *safe adult*.
- » Explain to adolescents that there is no need or urgency to respond to any messages. Teach adolescents not to respond to messages that make them feel uncomfortable.
- » Discuss dignity and self-respect and how it can be preserved or destroyed by messages sent online and offline.
- » Discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Adolescents should never meet someone in person that they first met online without an accompanying parent.
- » Discuss high-risk behaviour online and offline and create "what if" scenarios together to help them anticipate dangerous situations and possible solutions.
- » Teach them how to get out of relationships.
- » Encourage open communication and be conscious of their sensitivity to social judgment. They may be hesitant to share personal experiences.
- » Monitor and verify job offers.

This information sheet was created after consulting sources such as: Linda Ashford; Sharon Cooper, M.D.; Gavin de Becker; Erik Erikson; Jay Giedd; William Glasser, M.D.; Daniel Goleman; Michael Gurian; Kenneth Lanning; Mary Anne Layden and Linnea W. Smith, M.D.; Judith Lewis Herman; Amy Lynch; Jean Piaget; David Soussa; Deborah Yurgelun-Todd. Final content and arrangement is the responsibility of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc.