



**Confident
and**



Connected



**Survival
Guide**



MISSOULA FORUM
FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH



**for
Parents of Teens**

Letter of Introduction

Dear Parents,

The teen years are a very rewarding and often challenging period of development. Many parents find themselves unprepared to deal with the complexities that are associated with adolescence. As parents and former teens, you are probably aware that there are numerous factors that influence your teen's decision making every day.

This booklet is a guide for developing and maintaining a positive and supportive environment for your teen. It is designed to give parents support and valuable information for dealing with the issues today's teenagers may encounter. If you are interested in finding local resources to help you or your teen during these formative years, helpful information can be accessed by calling First Call for Help at 211 or 549-5555.

We hope you find this guide to be both practical and helpful.

The Staff of the Missoula Forum for Children and Youth

Table of Contents

Risk and Protective Factors	3
Keys to Confident and Connected Parenting	4
Communicating and Staying Involved	4-5
Expectations and Consequences	6
Opportunities for Growth and Independence	7
Healthy Relationships	8
Friendships and Safe Dating	8-9
Healthy Sexuality.....	10
Acceptance of Diversity	10
Healthy Living	11
Emotional Health, Depression and Suicide	11-12
Safe Driving	12
Physical Activity and Nutrition	13
Good Decision-Making	14
Alcohol and Other Drugs.....	14
Safe Teen Parties.....	15
Media and Internet Safety	16
Community Involvement	17
Teens and the Law	18-19

Risk and Protective Factors

Many different factors play a role in influencing the attitudes and emotional health of teens. The information contained within this guide is based on Risk and Protective Factor Theory developed by researchers at the University of Washington. Simply put, reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors may improve the likelihood that teens will grow into resilient and responsible adults.

What are Risk and Protective Factors?

Risk Factors are circumstances that increase the chances that an adolescent will engage in high-risk behaviors.

Protective Factors reduce the impact of risk factors and improve emotional health.

Examples of Risk Factors	Examples of Protective Factors
Alcohol and other drug availability	Recognition for positive behaviors
Unclear expectations or consequences	Healthy beliefs and clear standards
Favorable attitudes toward drug and alcohol use	Responsible decision making
Lack of involvement with parents, school, and the community	Opportunities for involvement within school, the community, and the family

Four places where teens are exposed to risk and protective factors:

**At Home
In School
With Peers
In the Community**

Teens can be exposed to **ALL** of the above Risk and Protective Factors in **ANY** of these places!

Keys to Confident and Connected Parenting



How can parents reduce risk factors?

Parents play a crucial role in reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors. The following is a list of four keys to parenting that promote protective factors while at the same time reducing risk factors:

1. **Communicating with your teen**
2. **Showing love and staying involved**
3. **Establishing clear expectations and consequences**
4. **Providing opportunities for growth and independence**

Keys to Listening and Talking:

Your teen *is* listening to you, believe it or not!

Teens say, and research shows, that parents are the #1 influence on teens' decisions about sex, alcohol and other drugs, healthy eating, physical activity, and other important health issues.

Initiate Conversations!

Some issues can be hard to talk about, such as sex, dating violence, and alcohol and other drug use. But talking about them is key to helping your teen avoid risks and maintain clear and healthy values. To discuss these tough issues, take advantage of everyday opportunities: TV shows, friends' experiences, time in the car together or family dinners.

Share your opinions, values, and needs and learn what your teen thinks, and why.

Articulate your decision-making processes aloud. Explaining how you make a decision is just as important as the decision. Talk about important issues again and again and again.

Don't forget to make time to talk with other adults in your teen's life.

You need support, too. Talking with other adults in your teen's life may help you recognize signs of trouble before a problem gets out of hand. It is also helpful if the most important adults in your teen's life communicate consistent messages about core values and health issues. Sometimes your teen may feel more comfortable talking about certain issues with other adults besides you. Make sure your teen knows that's okay. Help your teen think of a couple adults that you both trust to whom he can talk. And be sure to talk with the adults about this, too. **Make the time.**

Schedule time together and with the whole family. Do activities your teen enjoys. Eat dinner together.

Confident and Connected Parenting continued...

Communicating and Staying Involved

Stop, drop, and listen. Create an environment for communication. Stop what you're doing, drop what you're doing, even drop into a chair, and just listen. If you absolutely can't talk when your teen wants to, explain why, and set a time when you can give your teen your undivided attention.

Practice good listening.

- Make eye contact
- Use phrases like “Oh? I see... Really?”
- Ask specific questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” response.
- Ask questions seeking clarification or more information: “Why? When? Do you mean...?”
- Try not to interrupt, jump to conclusions, or be thinking about what to say next while your teen is talking.
- Try not to judge, attack, or get defensive.

Teens are developing their own identities.

Identities are created in part by declaring who they are not (rebelling); critiquing social standards and values (including yours!); and experimenting with adult roles. Enjoy the process. While sharing your opinions, help your teen develop her own opinions by asking specific questions and respecting your teen's individuality.

Use I-statements.

I-statements are assertive statements describing how you feel or think; they are designed to avoid attacking the other person and minimize defensive reactions. For example: “When I expect you to be home at a certain time and you are late, I feel worried, ignored, and tired the next day. What I'd like is for us to agree on a curfew and on a

consequence for breaking curfew, so I don't feel this way and I always know where you are, when to expect you, and that you are safe.”

Be on the lookout for comments or questions that might indicate a teen wants to talk about something but doesn't know how to bring it up. Be patient. Listen to what your teen is trying to say.

Show love and stay involved.

So how do you “stay involved” with a teen who's embarrassed when you even show up at school? Use your time and creativity! For example, you could offer to be the driver to activities. This lets you spend time with your teen and his friends, meet other parents, and learn what's happening in your teen's world.

Stay informed.

Talk regularly with your teen, other adults in your teen's life, your teen's friends, and your teen's friends' parents. Know who your teen is with, what she is doing, where she is, and when she will be back.

Look for warning signs of trouble.

If you're worried your teen is facing a problem, ask. Be sure to seek help if trouble continues—your teen's school is a great place to start. Don't ignore behaviors like alcohol or other drug use that put your teen's health, safety, or future at risk.

Confident and Connected Parenting continued...

Expectations and Consequences

Establish Clear Expectations and Consequences.

One of the last parts of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex—which helps us reason, respond safely to risk situations, and calm our emotions. Researchers say that the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until the early twenties. That’s why it’s important for parents of teens to help with decision making by establishing clear expectations and consequences.

As a family:

- Develop rules that make sense for your home and family.
- Agree on logical and appropriate consequences that will occur if a rule is broken.
- Be consistent—always follow through on consequences.

Use both natural and logical consequences.

Sometimes, it’s good to allow youth to face the natural consequences of their actions. Parents can help youth connect the dots between an action and an outcome, like watching TV instead of studying and then failing a quiz the next day. Other times, the natural consequences—car crashes, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.—are too severe to risk. Then, parents need to step in with logical consequences that are tied to the behavior. For example, reckless driving could lead to a cutback of driving privileges, or being late for curfew could result in an earlier curfew.

Consequences should be immediate and time-limited.

Consequences work best when their duration, set ahead of time, lasts until a youth does something specific to “earn back” more freedom. For example: “Because you weren’t where you said you’d be, you will have to check in every hour when you go out for the next two weeks so I will be able to trust that you actually will be where you say you’ll be.” If a consequence is too long, or too far in the future, teens will likely act out in the meantime.



Remember: Always thank and reward your teen for following the rules, and for exceeding them.

Be the Parent!

Confident and Connected Parenting continued...

Opportunities for Growth and Independence

Provide Opportunities for Growth and Independence.

Developmentally, the job of a teen is to stretch the limits set by parents, establish their own limits, and practice using their own judgment for becoming independent adults. A parent's job is to provide a safe, structured environment in which a child can grow into an adult. How? Set realistic limits, encourage growth and independence, and guide your child in making wise choices and decisions.

Pick your battles.

Is someone's health or safety at risk? Is it illegal? An obstacle to future success? If not:

- Allow your teen to make mistakes, and to learn from them. (Allow yourself to make mistakes, too!)
- Ask questions that help your teen think about the possible consequences of her choices and actions.

Encourage participation in after-school activities.

Youth who participate in structured, after-school activities:

- Demonstrate higher academic achievement;
- Are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug use;
- Have more positive attitudes about themselves and their community; and
- Develop stronger social skills and self-confidence.

Affirm your teen's growing independence by:

- ✦ Giving choices and granting new freedoms;
- ✦ Sharing family responsibilities, from chores to decision-making;
- ✦ Inviting your teen to participate in appropriate activities and conversations that adults in your family are enjoying; and
- ✦ Showing appreciation for your teen's opinions and identity.

Most importantly, have fun!



Healthy Relationships

"Open communication and being able to be yourself are important in a healthy relationship." Daniel

Friendships

As most parents know, you can't choose your teen's friends. However, you can help your teen build the skills he needs to choose friends who will have a positive impact on him.

You can build your teen's self-esteem by showing your support when your teen demonstrates good decision-making. If your teen makes a bad decision, make sure she understands the possible consequences of her choice and then support her in making better decisions in the future.

A teen with high self-esteem is more likely to form healthy relationships with peers. Make sure your teen understands what characteristics matter most in healthy relationships. Emphasize the value of trustworthiness, good decision-making, and being kind to others.

Meet your teen's friends and try not to judge them on their appearance before getting to know them. Find out what activities they are involved with and invite them to participate in your family's activities. Be sure to meet their parents and interact with them regularly.

Safe Dating

As teens begin to explore dating and more complex relationships, it is critical to help them define what constitutes healthy versus unhealthy relationships. A healthy relationship has open and honest communication and an even playing field on which partners share power and control over decisions. Unhealthy relationships have an imbalance in which one partner tries to exercise control and power over the other through threats, emotional abuse and physical abuse.

What can you do if your teen is in an unhealthy friendship or personal relationship?

- **Listen** to your teen's relationship problems.
- **Don't blame** your teen.
- **Ask** what you can do to help.
- **Seek** outside help from school counselors or other professionals.

Tips to help you talk to your teen about healthy relationships:

Assess your own values before you talk with your teen. How do you expect two people to act in a relationship? How should people work out disagreements? Make sure that you explain the reasoning behind your values and give specific examples.

Teach teens assertiveness, not aggressiveness. Help them learn to make their feelings known by stating their opinions, desires and reactions clearly. If your teen doesn't want to do something, she is going to need to be able to clearly and effectively say "no." When there is a conflict that cannot be settled, encourage your teen to take a break and cool down.

Teach your teen anger control. Help your teen recognize personal warning signs of anger, such as clenched fists, gritted teeth, or flushed face. Help your teen develop methods to calm down—perhaps counting down backwards from ten, taking deep breaths, or walking away.

Help your teen develop problem solving skills. When confronted with tough issues, ask your teen to determine exactly what happened and what may have caused the situation. Then ask your teen to think of several different ways in which the problem could have been resolved. Finally, ask your teen to consider the consequences of each of the possible solutions and then discuss the choices.

Talk to your teen about your views on appropriate behavior in dating relationships. Be a good role model. Teens learn by observing those around them, especially their parents. It is important that you demonstrate respect for yourself, your partner and other people.

Unfortunately one in three teens experience some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships, including physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. If you suspect your teen may be in an abusive relationship, watch for some of these signs:

- **Your teen loses interest in activities that he or she used to enjoy.**
- **Your teen stops seeing friends and family members and becomes more and more isolated.**
- **Your teen's boy/girlfriend calls your teen names and puts your teen down in front of other people.**
- **Your teen is constantly worried about upsetting his/her boy/girlfriend.**
- **Your teen has started using alcohol or other drugs.**
- **Your teen changes his or her eating or sleeping patterns.**

Sexual Activity

Sexuality is life-long, and it is natural and healthy. It is normal for your teen to explore sexual activity as part of the process of sexual maturation. The best way to keep your teen safe and healthy when it comes to sexuality is to have an open and honest line of communication. Studies show young people who talk with their parents about sexuality are more likely to make responsible decisions that affect their health and well-being and less likely to take risks with their sexual health.

Don't wait for questions to be asked. Some adolescents are full of questions, and others will never ask. Convey your own values around sexual activity.

Start early and speak often.

It is important to be aware that your teen wants to talk to you about sexual activity.

Listen.

When asked a question, ask what your teen already knows or why they asked. It is easy to talk *at* your teen; it can be harder to really listen.

Be a good role model.

Actions often speak louder than words. Your teen will learn about your sexual values by watching and listening to you.

It's never too late.

Don't think that if you haven't talked to your teen about sexual activity that it's too late.

Fostering Acceptance of Diversity

It is important to teach your teen the benefits of inclusion and of having friends from a variety of different cultural and social backgrounds. Here are a few tips:

Celebrate the diversity of kids and families.

Explore your cultural heritage as a family with your teen by sharing stories, foods, rituals, and the history of your heritage. People who know and feel good about their own heritage welcome the different experiences of others.

Talk to your teen.

Find ways to bring up issues about differences and find out what your teen thinks and why.

Be aware of media messages.

Messages concerning differences surround teens in their everyday activities. Media, such as the internet, music, TV, and advertisements, all influence your teen on a daily basis. Find out and discuss what messages are being given to your teen through these sources.

Model your values.

Evaluate your own lifestyle and determine if your lifestyle and actions match the values you discuss with your teen. Teens are more likely to be influenced by your actions than your words, so make sure your words match your actions!

Create opportunities.

Try to provide opportunities for your teen to interact with peers from different backgrounds. Suggest activities such as volunteering, working, or other extracurricular activities that will broaden your teen's social circle.

Healthy Living

“Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it.” Bill Cosby

What is good mental health?

Good mental health is a state of mind that helps a teen participate in and cope with everyday life. Good mental health doesn't mean a constant state of happiness, but it does mean that your teen should have the ability to handle a wide range of emotions.

16 Tips for Parents to Support Teen Mental Health

1. Communicate: ask questions, listen
2. Be involved in your teen's life
3. Show that you care
4. Encourage participation and involvement in activities
5. Know where your teen is and who he's with
6. Establish clear expectations and consequences
7. Recognize drastic changes in behavior
8. Seek help or advice whenever you feel overwhelmed
9. Take threats seriously
10. Relax together, play together
11. Praise your teen whenever possible
12. Write your teen positive notes
13. Don't expect perfection
14. Encourage self-expression
15. Nurture confidence and self-esteem
16. Maintain a safe and secure home

Signs of good mental health:

- Has high levels of self-confidence
- Can set realistic goals
- Has the energy to complete daily tasks
- Can cope well with disappointment or constructive criticism
- Shows interest in a variety of hobbies and activities
- Is curious and enjoys a wide range of pursuits
- Is able to concentrate and make decisions
- Can handle emotions appropriately
- Is able to balance activity and relaxation

It is important to know that your teen could experience depression. Depression is more than your teen occasionally having the blues; it's a persistent and debilitating condition that can lead to suicide.

What are the warning signs for depression?

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness and crying
- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sudden drop in school performance
- Increased irritability and anger
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits

What should you say if you suspect your teen is depressed?

- Remind your teen that you are there for them, and love them unconditionally
- Assure your teen that they can trust you, and remind them that it's okay to talk to another trusted adult
- Remind them that it's not their fault
- Let them know that you want to help in any way
- Do not tell your teen to "snap out of it" - a depressed teen needs love and understanding

What are the warning signs for suicide?

- Threatening to kill or harm oneself
- Seeking access to guns, pills, etc.
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Engaging in risky activities/behaviors
- Substance abuse
- Talking about suicide
- Dramatic mood changes

What to do in a crisis:

- Do not leave them alone
- Remove access to guns, drugs, razors, knives, pills, etc.
- Contact their doctor and mental health provider
- If unable to reach a doctor, take the person to a hospital emergency department
- If you are unable to transport the person, call 911
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK

If you are faced with an emergency, don't wait—call 911!

Safe Driving

Teenage driving presents one of the largest health risks to young people 13-19 years old. Driver education programs are great for teaching driving skills, but parents also need to play a role in keeping their teens safe on the roads. Here are a few tips for keeping your teen safe:

- Establish a period of supervised driving before your teen is allowed to take the car out alone
- Make sure your teen develops a habit of wearing a seat belt every time he drives or rides in a vehicle
- Limit "recreational" driving
- Set night driving curfews
- Don't allow your teen to talk on their cell phone while driving
- Be a positive role model! This means buckling your safety belt and avoiding cell phone conversations while driving
- Limit the number of passengers allowed in your teen's car
- Talk with your teen and make sure he understands the risks of impaired driving

Physical Activity

It is recommended that teens accumulate 60 minutes of moderately intense physical activity five or more days a week. Activities don't have to be done all at once but can be broken up into ten minute segments. In order to *increase* fitness levels, teens should get 20 minutes of vigorously intense physical activity three or more days a week. This could be jogging, biking uphill or swimming. Teens don't have to go to the gym and do the stair stepper for an hour to receive health benefits from physical activity. They can take a walk around the block with friends, rake the yard, walk the dog, or go for a bike ride.

What are the benefits of physical activity?

Physical activity decreases the future risk of stroke, cardiovascular disease, and other major health factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes. It promotes good bone, muscle, and joint health later in life. Physical activity also helps people cope with anxiety and stress and has been found to elevate a person's mood and alleviate depression.

Missoula is an outdoor recreational paradise—use our natural environment for a healthier life!

- Walk the dog as a family
- Hike the “M”
- Walk or ride bikes to and from school
- Take family walks in the Rattlesnake Recreation Area, along the Kim Williams Trail, or in Pattee Canyon

Nutrition

Learning to eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet is important for teens because the habits formed during adolescence often carry over into adulthood. Many common health problems, including heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis are preventable with proper nutrition. Many of these start to develop during adolescence even though the symptoms may not be detectable until adulthood.

How can parents help encourage their teens to eat nutritious foods?

Believe it or not, many teens report that their parents are one of their main sources of nutrition information! Parents can help teens develop healthy eating habits by:

- Modeling healthful eating behaviors themselves
- Encouraging teens to start the day with breakfast
- Keeping nutritious snacks around the house and limiting junk food and sugary beverages
- Communicating the importance of eating healthily versus trendy diets or dieting
- Making time for family meals
- Eating fish twice a week for the nutritious value of Omega 3 fatty-acids

And lastly, parents should remember to pick their battles! Even well informed teens with access to healthy foods at home are not going to select nutritious foods *all* the time! It's the big picture that matters.

Promoting Good Decision-Making

Alcohol and Other Drugs

As a parent you are the most important role model in your teen's life. What you say and do about alcohol and drugs matter a lot when it comes to the choices your teen makes.

Set positive examples with respect to alcohol and drugs.

Get involved in your teen's life by attending her activities, knowing her friends, and knowing where she's going and what she's doing. Be sure to have clear, consistent expectations about alcohol and drug use and be prepared to enforce them.

Talk to your teen early and often about drugs and alcohol. Discuss the legal and health consequences of drug and alcohol use. Perhaps most importantly, show your teen you care enormously about what choices he is making around drugs and alcohol. Taking the topic off the table isn't an option.

What to specifically look for if you suspect your teen is using alcohol or drugs:

1. The smell of alcohol on breath or clothes
2. Need for more money than usual
3. A sudden decline in attendance or performance at school or work
4. Sneaking out at night
5. Alcohol missing from your home
6. A change in friends

Know The Signs of Alcohol Poisoning.

Binge drinking, consuming five or more drinks in a row, is not safe or healthy. While this is something we hope your teen and her friends will avoid, it is important for you and your youth to know the signs of alcohol poisoning and what to do if someone is dangerously intoxicated. They may exhibit one or all of these signs:

- **Person is vomiting** - Keep them from choking, drowning in the toilet or harming themselves
- **Is hard to awaken or has passed out** Try to keep them awake, turn on left side to keep from choking on vomit, call 911
- **Is not breathing** - Call 911, perform CPR
- **Cannot be awakened, has blue nail beds** - Call 911

Encourage your teen to do the right thing and call 911 for his friend, even if he has been drinking, too.

Prescription Drugs: Abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs is on the rise in all age groups. Do not leave any prescribed or over-the-counter medications unlocked in your home. To properly dispose of any medication, grind the pills up and mix them with kitty litter or coffee grounds and throw them in the trash. Do not flush them down the toilet, as this contaminates our water supply.

Tips for Safe Teen Parties

Parties are an important part of many teenagers' lives; they are an outlet for socializing, relaxation, and entertainment. As a parent, you can help your teen avoid problems at parties that can lead to unwanted tragic consequences. The following are suggestions for parents to: 1) help your teens plan and host parties that are safe and fun; and 2) prepare your teens to make healthy decisions when they attend parties outside your home.

If the Party is at Your House...

- Before the party, discuss ground rules with your teen. Decide on the guest list and set a start and end time for the party.
- Be clear about the law: no underage drinking or other drug use. You could be held criminally and civilly liable for any consequences resulting from underage drinking at your house. Keep all alcohol inaccessible.
- Share responsibility for hosting the party with your teen. Have your teen explain and help enforce rules.
- Stay at the party. Be visible and available.
- Do not allow guests to come and go and be prepared to ask guests to leave if they refuse to cooperate with your rules.
- Notify the parents of any teen who arrives drunk or stoned and don't let the teen drive.

If the Party is Elsewhere...

- Obtain the name, address and phone number of the party giver.
- Contact the parents of the party giver to get specifics. Make sure a parent will be present and that alcohol and other drugs will not be permitted.
- Discuss curfew and how your teen plans to get home.
- Be sure they know they can call you at any time for a safe and early ride home.
- Discuss with your teens what to say and do if alcohol or other drugs are offered.
- Be awake or have your teen wake you when they get home.
- Require that any arrangements to stay overnight be made ahead of time, not last-minute.

The “Choking Game”, “Pass-Out”, and “Space Monkey” are all names for a very dangerous activity popular with adolescents and teens. Youth make themselves pass out by tightening a belt, necktie, dog leash or other type of cord around their necks, or by having a friend cut off their air supply, until they lose consciousness. They can do this activity alone or with friends, and it can start as young as eight years old. Many young people who may shun drugs and alcohol accept this dangerous activity as safe. They experience a “high” as they lose consciousness and again when the blood rushes back into their brain. Signs a child or teen may be doing this include: bloodshot eyes, frequent complaints of a headache, marks on the neck, any presence of cords, scarves, ropes, etc. tied to furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor, and any sudden increase in the amount of time spent alone. Please talk to your young person today and let her know this practice has killed many youth and has caused permanent brain damage in others.

Teens and Media

Today's teens are bombarded by media messages through radio, TV, magazines, billboards, signs, newspapers, movies, videos, video games, advertisements, and the internet. Parents can help teens become aware of media messages, learn to limit their screen time, and keep themselves safe while using media.

Media Messages

Alcohol, smoking, drug use, and inappropriate or unrealistic body images are often seen in movies, television shows, advertising, and video games. These behaviors are made to look normal and healthy so that young people are more likely to engage in them. The following are some tips to help you "tame" the effects of media in your home:

- **Watch TV and movies with your teen** and point out drinking and smoking and their adverse effects. Note that the vast majority of people will never have bodies like actors or models, but that there are many other normal and beautiful body types.
- **Set media time limits** and stick to them. Teens should have no more than 1-2 hours per day of "screen time" (TV, computer, or video games).
- **Know the rating systems and set rules** so that your teen is seeing age-appropriate content.
- **Keep media out of bedrooms.** Locating media in a central place allows you to supervise use, and also keeps your teen from spending most of her time in her bedroom.
- **Make a no-media rule** during mealtimes, while doing homework, and before bedtime.

Try to get your youth into the habit of asking for permission to use media.

Internet Safety

Often parents may feel overwhelmed and even intimidated by the vast universe that is the internet. You do not have to be an expert to help keep your teen safe, but you do have to be involved in their life online.

Safety Tips

- Any computer or gaming system with internet connectivity should be in the main part of the house, where you can easily monitor activity.
- Know who is on your teen's Instant Messaging (IM) "buddy list". Have him tell you about each person on the list and review the list with him occasionally.
- Make an effort to learn a few IM acronyms that, if understood, may alert you to potential trouble. For example, POS means "Parent Over Shoulder". Also, watch to see if your teen quickly closes any screens when you walk by.
- Make sure your youth does not give out any personal information on social networking or blogging sites. This includes not only full name and age but also where they work, go to school or participate in extra-curricular activities.
- Develop an Internet User Policy together with your teen. Agree on terms for use and consequences for breaking your agreement.

This is not a comprehensive tip list. For more information, search with your teen online for "teen cyber safety".

Community Involvement

Young people are among a community's most valuable assets. By embracing a young person as an active and contributing member of society we increase not only their chances for success, but also improve the quality of life for all of us in Missoula. Encourage your teen to get involved within their community by participating in something to which they feel connected and makes them excited. Teens need opportunities to contribute to their communities in meaningful and visible ways. You and your teen should consider both traditional and nontraditional options for youth involvement. Most community groups not only encourage youth voice, but also look for it. Your teen should not hesitate approaching any community group and asking to be included. Most have no age requirement for participation.

TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES	NONTRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You and your teen can explore school and club sports teams. Always ask if there are scholarships available before you decide an activity is too expensive. • After-school activities beyond sports are abundant in Missoula. Encourage your teen to ask friends and school staff about local activities and clubs for youth. Ask other parents what their kids are doing. • If your family is part of a faith community, inquire about activities available for your teen. • Contact the Western Montana Volunteer Center (www.volunteer.umn.edu) to find out about activities and projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a community member to be a career mentor for your teen and then create a regular job shadow opportunity. Check for such opportunities through your school, local service clubs like Rotary and Kiwanis, or family friends. • Encourage your teen to research local non-profits, service clubs and outdoor recreation and preservation groups. When they find a group with a mission that interests them, they can call and ask how to get involved. • Just because your teen may not be 18, does not mean they have no political voice. Encourage them to get involved with local political groups that align with their convictions.

ASKING MORE QUESTIONS

When trying to help your teen explore her interests, asking further questions can make a huge difference. For example, if your teen says she likes music, dig deeper. What does she like about music? Is it that it makes her want to dance? Is it the lyrics? Does she want to sing, play an instrument or get involved in production?

If she is looking for opportunities to be involved with non-profits, service clubs or outdoor groups, always ask if youth can serve on the board of directors, advisory groups or committees. Organizations may forget to offer these avenues for involvement.

Teens and the Law



Missoula City Curfew

Weekend curfew (Friday and Saturday nights) is the same year round: **1:00 a.m.**

Weekday curfew (Sunday through Thursday) during the school year is: **10:30 p.m.**

Weekday curfew (Sunday through Thursday) during summer vacation and holiday breaks is: **1:30 a.m.**

Montana's Graduated Driver's License Law

Montana has a three-step graduated driver's license for teens that gives them more privileges as they improve their driving ability through practice. Parents are important enforcers of the license requirements. The following is a brief summary of the law; more information is available online at www.doj.mt.gov/driving/driverlicensing.asp or by calling 406-444-3292.

Step 1: Permit Period

- Teens may apply for a Traffic Education Learner's License at age 14 1/2 if they are enrolled in a State-approved traffic education program. Teens may get a Learner's Permit at age 15 if they have successfully completed a traffic education course; otherwise the age is 16.
- The Permit is valid for up to one year, but the teen must have the Permit for a minimum of six months before applying for a First-Year Restricted License. During the permit period, teens must have at least 50 hours of supervised driving experience, 10 hours of which must be at night. Supervision of teens holding Traffic Education Learner's Licenses must be done by a licensed parent or guardian.

Supervision of teens holding Learner's Permits can be done by a licensed parent or guardian, or a licensed driver age 18 or older who has been approved by the parent/guardian. Everyone in the car must wear seatbelts and the teen must not have any traffic violations or drug/alcohol offenses. Parents/guardians must certify that these requirements have been met when the teen applies for a license.

Step 2: First-Year Restricted License

- Teens with a Restricted License cannot drive between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., with the following exceptions: emergencies, farm activities, driving to or from school, church or work, or other specific driving authorized by the parent/guardian.
- During the first six months with a Restricted License, teens may have only one unrelated passenger under age 18 unless they are supervised by a licensed driver 18 or older. During the second six months, the limit for unrelated passengers is three.

Step 3: Full Privilege Driver's License

- First-Year Restricted Licenses automatically end on the date on the back of the teen's license, or when the teen turns 18, whichever occurs first.

Teens and the Law continued...

Designated Drivers

Penalties for Teens Under Age 18 Charged with Possession of Alcohol

1st Offense

- Fine of \$100-\$300
- 20 hours of community service
- Pay for and participate in an approved community-based substance abuse information course
- Loss of driver's license for 30 days

2nd Offense

- Fine of \$200-\$600
- 40 hours of community service
- Pay for and participate in an approved community-based substance abuse information course
- Loss of driver's license for 6 months
- Complete chemical dependency assessment/treatment if recommended

3rd Offense

- Fine of \$300-\$900
- 60 hours of community service
- Pay for and participate in an approved community-based substance abuse information course
- Loss of driver's license for 6 months
- Complete chemical dependency assessment/treatment if recommended

Designated Drivers

Montana law was changed to say that “A person may not be arrested for or charged with the offense (possession of alcohol) solely because the person was at a place where other persons were possessing or consuming alcoholic beverages.”

On a final note...

We sincerely hope this guide has been easy to use and *useful*. It is our goal to present Missoula parents with relevant and up-to-date information about critical topics regarding parenting a teen. Your experiences parenting a teen have probably already presented you with a number of surprises—including situations that you would have never dreamed possible! Obviously no guide for parents of teens can adequately cover every topic. We do hope, however, that we've covered the most important topics that are the most relevant to you at this moment. Trust your heart, use your head, and talk to your teen every day about the things that matter the most, and use this guide during the moments in between! Remember, we're rooting for you and your teen!

The Staff of the Missoula Forum for Children and Youth

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