

Why Focus on Youth and Crime Prevention?

Teen Crime Victims

Did you know?

- Over 25 percent of the world's population is under the age of 18.
(www.ncvc.org/tvp/main.aspx?dbID=DB_YOVA528, viewed 5/23/06)
- When high school students were asked whom they would tell if they experienced a serious problem, 70 percent said that the first person they would tell would be someone their own age.
(www.ncvc.org/tvp/main.aspx?dbID=DB_YOVA528, viewed 5/23/06)
- Adolescents ages 12 to 19 are the victims of violent crime (including simple and aggravated assault, rape and other sexual assault, and robbery) at much higher rates than adults.
(www.childtrendsdatabank.org/indicators/71ViolentVictimization.cfm, viewed 5/23/06)
- These teen victims are highly vulnerable to being revictimized; one study found that 80 percent of youths reporting violent victimization had been victimized two or more times.
(www.ncpc.org/cms/cms-upload/ncpc/files/Teen%20Victims.pdf, viewed 5/23/06)
- Despite being victimized more often than other age groups, teens are the least likely to report their victimization.
(www.ncpc.org/cms/cms-upload/ncpc/files/Teen%20Victims.pdf, viewed 5/23/06)

According to a 2004 report on victimization published by the U.S. Department of Justice, teens are more likely than older people to become victims of violent crimes (including rape, robbery, and assault) and theft. In fact, they are twice as likely as adults to become victims of violent crime. Most adolescent victims of violent crime are victims of simple assault, followed by aggravated assault, robbery, and rape or sexual assault (*2004 National Crime Victimization Survey*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv04.pdf, viewed 5/23/06).

Although they are the most often victimized, teens are much less likely than adults to report crimes to the police. Some of the reasons teens do not report their victimization include the following:

- Lack of understanding that what they experienced was a crime
- Fear that no one will believe them
- Fear of being blamed or punished
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame
- Fear of retaliation
- Mistrust of adults
- Belief that nothing will be done
- Lack of knowledge about available services

- Perceived and real limits of confidentiality
(*Reaching and Serving Teen Victims* at www.ncpc.org/cms/cms-upload/ncpc/files/Teen%20Victims.pdf, viewed 5/23/06)

How Teens Can Reduce Victimization

It is always smart to think prevention. Many crimes can be prevented when individuals practice commonsense personal safety procedures.

The crime prevention Golden Rule for teens is “Know how to avoid danger and be alert to your surroundings, and help others do the same.”

You and your friends can do a lot to help each other be safe. Common sense does not have to rob you of fun, but it can keep you from being robbed of your possessions!

Here are some tips to help you reduce your chances of becoming a crime victim while out in the community, using public transportation, or in someone else’s home.

On the Street

- Travel with a friend or in a group. Travel during daylight hours whenever possible.
- Always let someone responsible know where you are going and what time you will be back.
- Never accept a ride from a stranger. Do not hitchhike, and do not pick up hitchhikers.
- Travel familiar, busy, and well-lighted routes. Avoid taking shortcuts through deserted, poorly lighted areas, especially at night.
- Keep your money and other valuables out of sight. Flashing them invites theft. Carry only the money you need that day, and always have enough change for a phone call. Never have your name and address on your key ring.
- Lock your bike in an area in public view. Use a case-hardened chain or cable and lock, winding the cable through the frame and both wheels and then around the bike rack or pole, or use a special U-shaped lock.

On Public Transportation

- Be alert when waiting for a bus or subway. Avoid waiting alone at night.
- Have your fare ready so that you don’t need to open your purse or wallet in view of others.
- Sit near the driver or conductor, especially during non-rush hours. But avoid sitting near the exit door where you could invite an attacker to “hit and run.”

In the Car

- Keep your car locked whether you are driving or parked.
- Keep valuables out of sight, preferably in the trunk.

- Park in well-lighted areas.
- Have your keys in your hand, ready to unlock your car as you approach it.
- Be alert to suspicious persons near your car. Check the front and back seats and floor before you get in.

At Home or While Babysitting at Someone Else's Home

- Always keep doors and windows locked, whether you are at home or leaving the house even for a brief period.
- Never let a stranger into the house, even if he or she says it is an emergency. If necessary, offer to phone for help while the person waits outside.
- Never indicate to anyone calling on the telephone or knocking on the door that you are home alone.
- Know where all the exits and telephones are located.

How To Report a Crime

Teens who see or experience a crime should do the following:

- Call the police immediately! It is important to report crimes to the police, even though seeing or experiencing crime can be upsetting.
- Tell the police who you are, where you are, and what happened.
- If anyone is hurt, ask for an ambulance.
- Try to stay calm. If possible, write down what you saw.
- When the police arrive, tell them exactly what you saw. Try to describe the scene of the crime. How many suspects were there? Did they say anything? If the crime was robbery, what did they take?
- Tell the police what the suspect looked like: age, sex, race, height, weight, clothing, facial features, etc. Was a car or other vehicle involved? If so, try to remember the make, model, color, license plate number, and which direction it was going when the suspect drove away. If possible, write down the license number.
- You may be asked to make a complaint or testify in court. Remember that if you do not help the police, the criminal might victimize someone else.
- The police may ask you to attend a lineup or look through photo albums to try to identify the suspect. Do your best.

Always report a crime. If you do not report it, law enforcement cannot help you, and someone else might become a victim.

How To Help a Friend Who Is a Crime Victim

If a friend is a crime victim, here are things you can do:

Just Be There

- Let your friend know that you care and that you will be glad to listen or talk, whether it is about the crime or some other subject. You show that you care by your presence.

- Offer to be with your friend the first time he or she goes out after the crime. Some victims feel very vulnerable and may be afraid of going out alone.
- If your friend wants to revisit the crime scene, offer to go along.
- Anniversaries of a crime are often very important to victims, and they may spend a lot of time dwelling on what happened. You may want to call or send a card just to let your friend know that you are thinking about him or her.

Listen

- Let your friend know that you are sorry the crime happened and that you blame the criminal, not your friend.
- Let your friend talk through how he or she feels about the crime. A crime victim may want to repeat the story over and over again one day and not even want to mention it the next.
- Be prepared for your friend to have confused and intense emotions about the event and about his or her treatment by the police, hospital personnel, and others.
- Avoid telling the victim you “understand” or “know” how he or she feels unless you have been a victim of the same or a similar crime. Even then, do not assume similar reactions.

Fix Up

- Offer to repair broken locks, torn screens, bike or car damage, torn clothing, or other visible results of the crime or to replace school books or meet other needs like these.

Lend a Hand

- Offer to go with your friend to follow-up doctor’s visits or babysit younger siblings for free so a parent can go with him or her.
- Offer to cook a special meal for your friend’s family.
- Be in court to provide moral support when your friend must testify.
- Help with the red tape of replacing driver’s license, IDs, school books, or other things that may have been stolen or damaged.
- Help with the day-to-day chores your friend may not be ready to cope with, such as preparing meals, watching children, or keeping up with school assignments.

Refer Your Friend to Someone Who Can Help

- Know what special victim assistance resources are available in your community. Is free counseling available? Will special compensation programs help pay for losses? Is there a hotline? (A great project for your faith-based youth group would be to create a special victim assistance resource list for teens in your community.)
- Let your friend know that it is all right to seek trained help.

Messages for Parents

Teens are the nation's most frequently victimized age group. Here are some tips for parents and caregivers of teens:

- Establish rules for your children and consequences for breaking the rules. Make sure the consequences are clear in advance. Don't make up rules and penalties after the fact.
- Engage your teens in discussions of risks, consequences, and prevention strategies. Help them develop the skills to make responsible decisions.
- Be sensitive to new situations that occur as teens mature—situations that may require different prevention behaviors and decisions.
- Work with teens about what can happen when they go into unfamiliar turf. Teach them how to practice sensible behaviors that avoid sparking incidents.
- Conflict management skills will stand any young person in good stead and may even keep him or her alive. Take the time to teach, practice, and model these skills.
- Help your teens understand why and how to report a crime. Help them understand how to identify crimes.
- What young people wear today can make them more vulnerable to crime. Understand that expensive athletic shoes, clothes, jewelry, and hand-held electronic devices could place your children in danger.
- Teach your teens not to carry more cash than absolutely necessary.
- Take time to identify appropriate places in the community where your teens could seek help if they need to. Role-play scenarios to reinforce where they can go for help.
- Create an atmosphere where older children can feel safe in admitting a victimization. Be careful not to blame the crime victim.