



Key Teen Safety Messages

This resource has been developed to assist responsible adults, including parents/carers and teachers, to relay practical safety messages to young people aged 13 – 19 years .

Teenagers represent a particularly vulnerable demographic in terms of personal violence. According to the *2015-16 Queensland Police Service Statistical Review*:

- Girls aged 15 – 19 years are most likely to experience personal violence.
- Girls aged 10 - 19 years are most likely to experience sexual abuse, with this demographic representing 45% of all sexual offence victims. Sexual offences are unique in that offenders are most commonly known to victims, with a large proportion being family members.
- Boys aged 15- 19 years are most likely to be victims of robbery.
- Boys aged 15 – 19 years also present the most likely offenders of personal violence.

The *Safe T: Protective Behaviours for Young People* (Safe T) program seeks to maximise the safety and enhance the wellbeing of young people aged 13 - 19 years and encourage them to reach their full potential. While the program's concepts and strategies apply to a broad range of situations, there is a focus on reducing the risk of harmful behaviours including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, suicide, self-harm and substance abuse.

The *Safe T* program is based on the following core philosophies:

- Children and young people have a right to be safe with people.
- Adults in the child or young person's life (including parents/carers, teachers, etc.) have a responsibility to protect children and young people from harm and to equip them with safety knowledge and skills.
- A healthy self-esteem is fundamental to self-protection and a person's ability to reach their full potential.
- To maximise their safety, children and young people need to be equipped with an awareness of risks and empowered with strategies and skills to effectively respond to safety threats.

Four safety messages underpin the *Safe T* program:

1. Be yourself, everyone else is taken

To build a healthy self-esteem and encourage respect and empathy for others.

2. Safety is my right

To identify and effectively respond to potentially unsafe situations and environments, including bullying.

3. My body, my say

To identify, prevent and stop all forms of abuse.

4. I can get help

To access help from trusted adults and relevant organisations.

The components of each of these messages will be outlined in this resource:

1. Be yourself, everyone else is taken

Aim: To build a healthy self esteem and encourage respect and empathy for others.

The link between self-esteem and mental, physical and emotional wellbeing has long been recognised. In relation to sexual abuse, children and young people with a high self-esteem are less likely to be targeted by offenders, are more likely to challenge the abuser and stop the abuse, and are more likely to disclose abuse to a trusted person.

There are four components of this key message:

a) Appreciating individuality:

Young people should be encouraged to appreciate and take pride in their individuality including their appearance, cultural and family background, gender, talents and abilities, likes and dislikes. It is also important for them to appreciate the individuality of others and to recognise that being different is what makes us spectacularly unique and one of a kind.

As responsible adults, we can assist in boosting children and young people's self-esteem by appreciating their individuality, praising them for what they do well, constructively correcting them when needed and encouraging them when they lack confidence undertaking a particular task. Teens in particular tend to look and behave like others in order to fit in. You are encouraged to call out this tendency and challenge young people to have the courage to stand out and 'be themselves'.

b) Expect Respect:

People treat us how we allow them to. Teaching young people to expect respect from themselves and others is an important step to building a healthy self esteem. We can do this by assisting them to set boundaries of unacceptable behavior and discussing steps that could be taken if people "cross the line" of acceptable behaviour.

It is also important to teach young people the value of showing others respect and how they can do this. Consider setting rules of acceptable behaviour at home or in the classroom to ensure boundaries are readily identified, and agreed consequences are consistently enforced when a rule is broken. For best results, develop rules and consequences in consultation with young people.

c) Expressing ourselves assertively:

Encourage young people to take ownership of their feelings and to express themselves in a way that demonstrates self respect as well as result for others. Assertive communication is a skill that does not come naturally for most people and needs to be practised regularly. We can develop assertiveness skills by: understanding different communication styles (passive, aggressive, passive aggressive and assertive); acknowledging the benefits of assertive communication; and practising to communicate assertively.

d) Building Resilience:

We can help to build young people's resilience by encouraging them to develop: a habit of positive thinking; an optimistic outlook on life; and a problem-solving response to challenging situations. Rather than rescuing young people or telling them what to do, adults are encouraged to discuss options and to provide support.

Other Self Esteem Building Strategies for Parents/Carers:

- Say I Love You
- Develop and maintain special daily rituals
- Let your children help you
- Take an interest in their sports or hobbies
- Eat meals as a family
- Seek out one-on-one opportunities often
- Praise desirable behaviour (praise should be genuine and specific)
- Correct firmly but lovingly
- Respect their choices
- Make your child/children a priority in your life

2. Safety is my right

Aim: To identify and effectively respond to potential unsafe situations and environments.

a) Right to safety:

We all have the right to be safe with people. It is important for young people to be aware of this right and understand that it's not acceptable for someone to make them feel unsafe or to put them in danger. If they do not feel safe they need to know they can do something about it.

b) Corresponding responsibilities:

Having the right to be safe with people means young people have a responsibility to maintain their safety and to take action if their safety is threatened, such as going to a safe place and telling an adult they trust to ensure the threat is removed.

They also have a responsibility to respect others' right to safety. Parents and teachers may discuss how young people can respect others' right to safety, for example by treating others with respect and by assisting people in need of help.

c) Preventative safety measures:

The safety messages contained in this resource do not seek to impose unnecessary restrictions on young people's lives or in any way diminish their spirit of fun and adventure. Young people are instead encouraged to think about how they can maintain their safety while doing the things they enjoy, accepting that there will be a degree of risk involved.

In almost every situation we can reduce identified risks by putting in place simple safety measures. Safety measures can be specific to an activity, for example wearing a helmet and appropriate footwear when riding a bike or wearing a seat belt and not distracting the driver when in a car. Other safety measures are more general, such as making sure a parent is aware of young people's whereabouts, who they are with and when they are expected home. Parents and teachers are encouraged to assist young people to identify risks in the activities they enjoy and to implement safety measures to reduce them. For example, ask "How could someone keep themselves safe...(doing a particular activity, such as going to party with friends or staying over someone's house)?".

d) Early warning signs

Early warning signs are our body's way of telling us we don't feel safe. They can include butterflies in the stomach, sweaty palms, a pounding heart, shaky knees, wanting to be sick, and so on. We can experience early warning signs in three situations:

1. When it is *fun* to feel scared, e.g. watching a scary movie or going on a fast ride.
2. When it is *not fun*, but our choice and we are in control, e.g. delivering a class presentation, going to the dentist or getting a needle from a doctor/nurse.
3. When it is *not fun*, there is *no choice or control*. This is a *personal* emergency. Personal emergencies may include being bullied or chased by a ferocious dog.

It is important for young people to recognise when their body is telling them they do not feel safe through their early warning signs and to determine if they are experiencing a personal emergency.

Note: It is important to note there may be situations where young people experience personal emergencies, but do not feel early warning signs. An example is young people who have been sexually abused from an early age and who identify the abuse as normal behaviour. The grooming process used by offenders often involves building a trusting relationship with the child. Young people may not experience early warning signs when they trust and feel safe with the offender, as they can be ignorant to the fact the offender's behaviour is inappropriate and abusive. While this issue is acknowledged, an awareness of other safety concepts included in this resource will assist young people who may fall into this category, in particular educating them about body ownership and the rules about touching.

e) **Personal emergencies:**

If young people experience a personal emergency they need to know what they can do to feel safe again, such as removing themselves from the situation as quickly as they can and disclosing the situation to a trusted adult who can assist them.

Young people may need to break a rule in order to get to safety, such as:

- rules of good or accepted behaviour, such as "telling on someone";
- school rules, such as leaving the classroom or school without permission; or
- laws, in extreme circumstances, such as trespassing, driving unlicensed or breaking into someone's house.

The challenge for adults is to ensure young people understand rules which may be justifiably broken in various situations and which rules which may not. A suggested strategy to determine appropriate responses in a personal emergency, as well as to develop problem solving skills, is exploring actions that may be taken in a range of personal emergency scenarios. For example, How would someone keep themselves safe if they were: being bullied at school/offered drugs/being sexually abused by a relative?

f) **Bullying:**

Students, teachers, parents and school communities all have a role to play in both preventing, and responding to, bullying. In order to tackle this significant issue, it is helpful for all parties (students, teachers and parents) have a good understanding of the topic. We need to understand what bullying is (and what it is not), how it can occur and why some children and young people engage in bullying behaviour. An understanding of the impact of bullying and how young people could respond to bullying behaviour is also recommended.

Efforts should be invested into developing an anti-bullying culture, where strategies are put in place to make it socially unacceptable to bully or to witness bullying without taking action to assist the target/s, and acceptable to report incidents.

An effective school anti-bullying policy that is understood and followed by students, teachers and parents is a great start. As is articulating the role of bystanders, where witnesses to bullying behaviour accept responsibility to intervene, either directly or indirectly. This intervention may include standing up for the person being bullied or reporting the incident to a teacher or parent.

3. My body, my say

Aim: To identify, prevent and stop all forms of abuse.

a) **Body Ownership:**

One of the most powerful messages to convey to young people to prevent them from becoming a victim of sexual abuse is that their body belongs to them and what they do with their body and who touches them is their choice. As part of appreciating body ownership, young people are encouraged to take care of their bodies. They can do this by eating healthy food, exercising, and not putting themselves (and their bodies) in danger.

b) **Defining abuse:**

Child sex offenders prey upon children and young people who are naïve and are unaware of which behaviour constitutes inappropriate touching. Children and young people need to know that it is *not okay* for anyone to:

- touch or look at the private parts of their body without their consent;
- force them to touch or look at someone else's private parts; or
- expose them to sexualised images or videos; and/or
- to take sexualised photographs/videos of them.

Young people need to be aware of the rights they have regarding their bodies, including:

- for their choices to be respected
- to change their mind
- to express their feelings
- not to be physically, emotionally or sexually abused; and
- to seek help if they experience abuse.

They also need to respect the choices others make about their bodies too,

c) **Responding to abuse:**

If a young people experiences abuse they are encouraged to respond by:

- Telling the person to stop;
- Leaving immediately (break rules if necessary to get away); and
- Telling a trusted adult exactly what happened as soon as possible. Young people need to be encouraged to continue telling until they are listened to, believed and action is taken to ensure they both are safe and feel safe again.

Young people should be assisted to recognise the importance of reporting abuse to stop it from occurring and *how* to report, including who to tell and what to say. Practising disclosures is encouraged, including being persistent if they are not initially believed or if they don't receive the help they need.

d) **Known abusers:**

Statistically we know the greater majority of abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the young person. It is also estimated a third of sexual abuse is perpetrated by another young person. Therefore, it is imperative young people are aware of this possibility and have strategies in place (such as those listed above) should it occur. It is also important for young people to be aware of tactics frequently engaged by offenders to groom targets, such as spending time alone with them or giving them money or gifts. Any such incidents should be reported directly to a parent or another trusted adult.

e) **Perpetrators online:**

Online predators often have access to young people via social media, chat rooms, video gaming and other internet based connection points. It is extremely easy for a perpetrator to

make contact with a young person and quickly form a relationship, often using an alter ego to establish trust. Perpetrators generally seek to pressure children and young people to take sexualised images or videos of themselves to share with the perpetrator and/or to meet with them face to face to abuse their target.

General internet safety guidelines for young people include:

- Set strict social media privacy settings to limit unknown people accessing personal information. Note: This doesn't limit friends from on-forwarding or sharing posts and pics.
- Avoid sharing personal information in any context online, including their name, home address, phone number or school. Usernames are often a give-away.
- Be aware that unless set to a hidden location setting, photos that are uploaded or otherwise shared include a 'geocode' that provides the GPS location of where the photo was taken. This information can easily reveal the home address and regularly visited places of the target.
- Avoid sending pictures or videos of themselves to someone they don't know (i.e. someone they haven't met off-line/ in 'real life'). If they have been pressured into sending a sexualised image or video, perpetrators will often use threats and/or blackmail to pressure them to provide more. In this instance, young people need to be encouraged to report the situation to a trusted adult and police to stop the abuse from continuing.
- Young people should take extreme care if arranging a face to face meeting with someone they have met online. Strategies include: first having a live video chat via Skype etc. to ensure they are in fact the person they are claiming to be; meet in a public area; take a friend; tell a parent about the plan.

f) Secrets:

Sex offenders commonly use secrecy to keep their victims silent. Subsequently young people need to be encouraged to tell a trusted adult about any secret that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, upset, angry, confused and/or unsafe in any way.

4. I can get help

Aim: To access help from trusted adults and relevant organisations.

a) Benefits of talking with someone:

Discussing the benefits of talking with someone when they feel scared, confused, sad or upset will encourage young people to approach you and/or other trusted adults during these times. Such benefits include gaining help, advice and support to put the problem into perspective and to determine the best response option. Sharing a problem can also provide a sense of relief and increase the young person's confidence in solving the problem for themselves.

b) Developing a safety network:

A Safety Network is a group of at least five trusted adults, chosen by the young person, who can be approached for assistance if they experience a personal emergency or have a problem. A minimum of five network members increases the likelihood of at least one network member being available at any one time.

Young people are encouraged to select network members they trust, who are available, and who will listen to them, believe them and assist them when needed. Network members may include relatives (including immediate family and extended family members), neighbours, friends' parents, teachers or the school principal, sports coaches, Adopt-a-Cops and/or youth leaders, priests or ministers. Agencies such as Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) may also be used as a network member. It is suggested only one network member they reside with be selected,

in addition to four network members outside of the home – this will help ensure objective support and advice from others if there is an issue within the home.

A Safety Network is more likely to be effective if network members are aware of the expectations of their role. Subsequently, young people should be encouraged to approach potential network members to clarify their role and to gain their acceptance before they become part of their Safety Network.

c) Using a safety network:

Young people will be more inclined to use their Safety Network if they are aware of how to best approach network members. It is a good idea to communicate that they are approaching the person as a network member to indicate the importance of the conversation.

Should a network member be unavailable, not listen, not believe the person or fail to take the necessary action, young people need to *persist* in seeking help from other network members. The only time they should stop seeking assistance is when they feel safe again or the problem has been solved. *Note:* While a Safety Network provides a great source of support and assistance, it should not be seen as an exclusive list. Young people should be encouraged to also seek help elsewhere as needed.

d) Assisting others:

Young people should be encouraged to consider how to be a good friend or classmate for others. Examples include approaching classmates or friends who appear sad, withdrawn or in need of help, listening to them and/or approaching an adult for assistance on their behalf.

Cautionary notes:

- Parents, teachers and other responsible adults are encouraged to adapt the key safety messages to ensure the information provided, and delivery method/s used, are age-appropriate for the audience.
- The manner in which adults convey safety messages is also crucial and should aim to *prepare* rather than scare. Fear-evoking messages are likely to increase fear and diminish confidence, thereby putting the young person at greater risk. Safety messages conveyed in a supportive and empowering manner will equip young people with an awareness of safety threats, together with practical strategies, skills and confidence to effectively respond to them.
- Young people need regular opportunities to transfer safety knowledge into behaviour. Behaviour rehearsal is most effectively achieved through role plays. Other rehearsal opportunities include discussing 'what if' situations and encouraging problem-solving to identify appropriate responses.
- While teaching the four key safety messages of the Safe T program will assist to promote young people's safety and wellbeing, no program or information in the world can *guarantee* their safety. It would be remiss of parents or teachers to believe that as a result of young people being exposed to these messages that they no longer are required to actively protect the young people in their care.