

# Personal Safety & Healthy Child Development

For parents with children  
**13-15 YEARS**

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?

- » Chat, message and/or text using different apps.
- » Play games online and using gaming consoles.
- » Take pictures and/or make videos using their devices.
- » Share images and videos as part of chats/messaging conversations.
- » Download or stream content from the internet, like movies or TV.
- » Use social networking apps; creating profiles, sharing content and/or chatting.
- » Watch, share and create videos online using websites like YouTube®.
- » Confide in friends online and offline.
- » Expect privacy and want more independence.
- » Explore neighbourhoods with friends (by bike, skateboard, scooter, walking, etc.).
- » 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.
- » Use computer and other devices for school work.
- » Research topics using search engines.

## Things to Consider

- » Use parental controls on your computer and other devices.
- » 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.
- » Pay attention to who your child is chatting with online, and encourage your child to only accept friend requests from people they know in real life.
- » Discuss risks associated with peer-to-peer file sharing programs (used to download music and other media) as they may be exposed to sexually explicit material.
- » Monitor use of the cameras on your child's device(s), 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 make, access, 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 do the right thing and to be good custodians of other people's information by not forwarding 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 or activities. Reinforce that it is always up to adults to protect children; never a child's fault.
- » 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. Explain that if they make a mistake, they can always come to you for help.
- » 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 uncomfortable situations.
- » Encourage open communication and be conscious of their sensitivity to social judgment. They may be hesitant to share personal experiences.
- » Monitor and verify job opportunities.

This information sheet was created after consulting multiple sources by multiple professionals, including: Linda Ashford, Ph.D.; Sharon W. Cooper, M.D.; Gavin de Becker; Erik Erikson, Ph.D.; Jay Giedd, M.D.; William Glasser, M.D.; Daniel Goleman, Ph.D.; Michael Gurian, Ph.D.; Kenneth Lanning, MS; Mary Anne Layden, Ph.D.; Linnea W. Smith, M.D.; Judith Lewis Herman, M.D.; Amy Lynch, Ph.D. (O.T); Jean Piaget, Ph.D.; David A. Sousa, EdD; and Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, Ph.D. Final content and arrangement done by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc.

