

# Arm kids to be safe

## Make sure teens are protected when they're out

By Pam J. Hecht  
WNC Parent contributor

Like a bird ready to fly, your increasingly responsible tween or teen is up for some independence. But how can you make sure he or she stays safe while out on the town without you? Here are some tips.

### Stay connected

"The most important thing is to encourage open communication between parents and kids from an early age," says Sgt. Steve Oxner, crime prevention director, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office.

Know their friends, he says, and when they're ready to venture out without you, talk about whom they'll be with, where they'll be and what they'll be doing, says Oxner.

Express your concerns about their safety and remind them to always be aware of their surroundings, says crime prevention officer Allen Dunlap of the Asheville Police Department.

"Help them understand potential risks, but don't just tell them what to do — listen and allow them to make suggestions, too," says Anna Sharratt, community educator for Our VOICE, a sexual assault prevention and intervention organization in Asheville.

Kirsty Kline, of Asheville, says she and her 15-year-old daughter regularly discuss "what-would-you-do-if scenarios," she says. "And if she ever feels she's in a bad spot, she knows she can call me and I will get her."



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### Set boundaries

Provide a cell phone and establish mandatory check-in times, says Oxner.

Kline requires her daughter to call her as soon as she arrives at her destination. They discuss the plans beforehand and if there are any changes, she must "notify me immediately," she says.

Tell them to stick with their friends at all times — a group of three or more is best, Oxner says.

And enforce a reasonable curfew, Dunlap adds.

### Instill confidence

Give kids opportunities to build self-confidence — it will prevent them from following friends who stray into dangerous areas or make unsafe decisions, Dunlap says. Increase the level of independence gradually, he adds.

When Loree Olsson's 16-year-old daughter was younger, she could go places like the mall with friends, but Olsson, of Asheville, would stay nearby and they would meet up at designated times, she says.

"Teach kids to follow their instincts and to recognize the warning signs of unsafe situations," Sharratt says.

### Consider self-defense

While being stalked by an unwanted admirer, Dunlap's 18-year-old daughter felt less fearful and more in control after enrolling in a martial arts class, says Dunlap.

A good self-defense class is one that teaches safety without scaring or causing excessive worrying, advises the National Crime Prevention Council.

But while learning self-defense techniques can build confidence, Dunlap adds, the best thing is to know how to

avoid conflict and seek help.

Since her daughter started driving and going places on her own, Olsson enrolled the two of them in a women's self defense course at the Reuter YMCA in South Asheville.

The class emphasizes personal empowerment and safety for ages 8 and older, teaching how to avoid bad situations as well as escape and self-defense techniques, says Kris Kaufman, YMCA wellness director.

Continues on Page 5

# Safety tips

Continued from Page 2

## Staying safe

Here are some safety tips from Sgt. Steve Oxner, crime prevention director, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office:

- ◆ Never take anything from or go anywhere with strangers.
- ◆ If you see suspicious activity, find a security guard or store manager.
- ◆ If isolated and in danger, scream to draw attention.
- ◆ Never allow yourself to be put into a car — scream "fire" or "rape" and run.
- ◆ Park car in well-lit areas.
- ◆ Don't walk to/from your car alone if uncomfortable, especially at night.
- ◆ Walk to your car purposefully — scan the horizon and have keys in hand.
- ◆ Drive away immediately upon entering your car.

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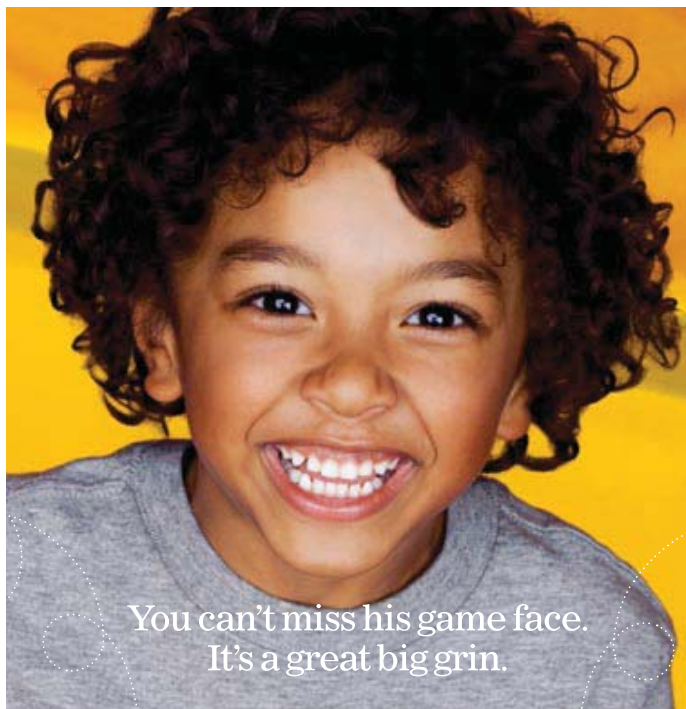
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