

# Safety

## Awareness, prevention, caution, action

"You have the right to be safe and a responsibility to help make it happen."

*Barbara Lewis*

**D**id you know that teens are crime targets more often than any other age group? Every 19 seconds, a teen somewhere in the United States is a victim of a crime. Did you know that 50 percent of automobile deaths could be prevented if passengers wore seat belts? That it costs about \$500 to replace a broken school window? That removing graffiti from school doors and walls can cost taxpayers (including your parents) \$3,400 for each separate incident?<sup>1</sup>

Although some adults might dismiss you as "just a kid," there's a lot you can do to make the world a safer place by preventing crime in your neighborhood, community, and school. You shouldn't feel responsible for keeping everyone safe, but you shouldn't feel *excluded* from helping because of your age. When you work to make things safer for others, you make things safer for yourself, too.

Becoming more safety-conscious, promoting safety, and doing your part to work for safety are all good habits to develop. You can focus your efforts and energies on one (or many) safety-related areas, including:

**1. Crime prevention.** You might decide to concentrate on:

- alcohol and drug abuse
- animal abuse

- arson
- child abuse and neglect
- curfew violations
- drunk driving
- environmental abuse
- graffiti
- kidnapping
- murder
- robbery/burglary/theft
- runaways
- sexual assault
- sexual harassment
- suicide
- truancy
- vandalism
- violence against people
- violence against property
- what else?

"There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time."

*Calvin Coolidge*

**2. Accident prevention.** You could consider getting involved with:

- home safety (fire prevention, safe use of electricity, carbon monoxide, pesticides, poison prevention, etc.)

<sup>1</sup> Sources: National Crime Prevention Council and National Safety Council.

her brochure, finally hearing from places as far away as Brazil and Egypt.

One boy in a detention home wrote her a letter and asked her how he could get off drugs. Ellen worried and stewed over what to say. She finally wrote a message advising him to trust himself and pledge to stay off drugs one day at a time. She watched the mail, but he didn't write back.

She designed a T-shirt and buttons that said "I live in a Drug-Free Home, and I'm proud of it," decorated with a picture of a house tied with a red ribbon. When she was interviewed on television, her program spread across the U.S. She was invited to speak at conferences and workshops in Texas, Ohio, and Georgia.

Meanwhile, her parents still expected her to fulfill her family responsibilities. Ellen did chores, cooked some of the meals, and took care of the family dogs. She also volunteered at the local Red Cross, planted trees, and got involved in other volunteer projects with the Scouts. Her bedroom was a disaster area, piled high with papers, brochures, socks, and T-shirts tossed in corners and under her bed. (Nobody's perfect.)

During the summer after eighth grade, when Ellen was fourteen, she decided to organize another program. She had received many letters from kids who didn't know how to start their own projects. Ellen called her program "Youthwish." Through Youthwish, Ellen encouraged kids to volunteer, gave instructions for how to set up a volunteer fair, and explained how kids could share ideas for networking

with adults. She began a biweekly newsletter and asked a teacher to be her sponsor. The teacher helped Ellen to make Youthwish a nonprofit corporation so it wouldn't be taxed. Shortly after, Ellen won the Noxzema Extraordinary Teen Award for volunteering. She received \$5,000 for her favorite charity. With that money, she set up \$500 grants through Youthwish for kids who wanted to start their own programs.

The real prize came later, though. One day, Ellen was speaking and volunteering at a public event. A young man walked up to her and introduced himself. It was the boy who had written to her long ago from the detention home. He told Ellen that although he'd written to many people when he was imprisoned and alone, asking for help, she was the only one who had responded with a personal letter of encouragement. It had meant a lot to him. He was no longer using drugs, and he thanked her.



Ellen (center) and her friend Naomi delivering emergency supplies to Hurricane Andrew victims