

## PARENT RESOURCES

### GENERAL RESOURCES:

- Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI): <https://www.fosi.org>
- Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewinternet.org/>

### PARENTING:

- "Parenting in the Digital Age: How Parents Weigh the Potential Benefits and Harms of Their Children's Technology Use"  
<https://www.fosi.org/policy-research/parenting-digital-age/>
- Parents and Social Media (PEW Research Center):  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/07/Parents-and-Social-Media-FIN-DRAFT-071515.pdf>
- Screen time contracts:  
<http://www.screenagersmovie.com/contracts-1/>
- Parental control apps and resources:  
<http://www.screenagersmovie.com/new-page-1/>
- Common Sense Media – dedicated to supporting parents, kids and families in a world of technology and media:  
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

### CYBERBULLYING

- Cyberbullying Research Center: <http://www.cyberbullying.org>
- Stomp Out Bullying: <http://www.stompoutbullying.org>
- Teens, Social Media and Technology (PEW Research Center):  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>

- Tip sheet for parents on popular apps:  
<https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/app-tip-sheets/>
- 'Screenagers' movie website with information and resources:  
<http://www.screenagersmovie.com/>

## Sexual Abuse prevention

- [www.D2L.ORG](http://www.D2L.ORG)
- [www.wcasa.org](http://www.wcasa.org)
- [www.victimsofcrime.org](http://www.victimsofcrime.org)
- [www.preventionboard.wi.gov](http://www.preventionboard.wi.gov)
- <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm>
- <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/focus-areas/child-abuse-neglect>
- <http://cysfresno.org/preventing-child-abuse-and-neglect/>

# Parenting Your Teen: Passwords and Code Phrases

One of the best tools any parent can give a young child is a family password, usually a word that the child has chosen. This is the word that protects them from the predators in the world. We teach our kids that if someone they don't know tries to talk to them, invites them to go for a ride, says their mom or dad wants them to let this person give them a ride home, then this person must also know the family password. In essence, nonfamily members can learn the password only from a family member. If someone outside the family knows the word, then that person can be trusted. If that person doesn't know the word, your child says that his mommy and daddy won't let him do anything without first hearing the password. And then your child can do whatever it takes to get away: be rude, yell, run, scream, walk away.

This is a great idea with young children, but it changes when your kids enter adolescence. Now you move from the family password to the family code phrase.

By the time your kids are teenagers, they know the right thing to do in just about any circumstance (see Teenagers: Self-Esteem Through Integrity). However, this does not mean they always do what they know is the right thing. Sometimes this is because of a yearning for a new experience; sometimes to fit in with a new group of friends; sometimes because they are bored; and sometimes because they don't have the strength to say no. When they fail to do the right thing because of this last reason—they don't have the internal strength to say no—this is exactly where the family code phrase comes to the rescue. In any situation that requires your teenager to take two big steps forward in responsibility when they are capable of only one step forward, the family code phrase helps you to meet them halfway.

Like the password, the code phrase is something that your teenager is familiar with and it's a phrase known only to family members. The simpler the better. The names of nonexistent relatives is a favorite of mine: Aunt Rose, Uncle Mickey. This is how it works: As soon as your teenager utters this phrase while in conversation with you, your job is simple: to say no to whatever she is asking. Then, no matter how much of a struggle she puts up, hold your ground. Let her have the full range of her abilities to argue with you and to make a scene if necessary. It's worth it, and here's why.

The point of the code phrase is that it's a means for your teenager to say to you *There's something going on here that I don't want to be a part of, but it's too big a leap for me to take to get out of it now. I need your help. Please say no to what I ask and then let me make a fuss so that I can save face in front of my friends. Please!* Instantly, you know that your teenager is in over his head, that he needs your help, that he is clear about the help that he needs, and that whatever follows is not meant personally.

It was around 11:00 P.M. on a Saturday night when Carmen called. She had gone out earlier that night with her friends Julie and Sandy and wasn't due home for at least another hour.

"Hi, Mom. I'm over at Sandy's and I'm wondering if I can spend the night? We're just hanging around watching movies and talking. And yes, Sandy's mom is home."

A good sign when she could answer my questions before I had asked them. I congratulated myself and said, "Sure. Sounds fine. Will you need a ride home in the morning?"

"Oh, Mom. I meant to tell you before I left, but Uncle Mickey called today and said he wanted you to call him back. Sorry."

I was stunned. We had talked about this moment, but somehow I had never imagined it happening. "Uncle Mickey? Did I hear you correctly?"

"I'm sorry. You're right. I should have left you a note."

As I wondered what could possibly be going on for her to use the code phrase, I said, "Well, in that case you need to come home. How about I come get you in fifteen minutes?"

"Mom! You've got to be kidding! Why can't I spend the night? Don't be silly!"

Momentarily stunned by this apparently mixed message—using the code phrase and getting angry with me—I then realized she was playing to her friends, who were probably within earshot of our conversation.

"Are Julie and Sandy standing right there and listening?" I asked.

"Of course. It's fine with Sandy's mom if I stay, so why won't you let me?"

"Carmen, if it helps, you have my permission this one time to swear at me. Just this once."

"Stop being an a\*\*\*\*, Mom!"

"I'm not sure what's going on over there, but I'll be out front in fifteen minutes."

As she hung up the phone, I'm pretty sure I heard her take full advantage of the situation by spewing out a few more curse words, but I'm not sure.

When she came out of Sandy's front door, she sent me a look full of anxiety. I knew we were still in role. She got into the passenger seat, crossed her arms, and stared straight ahead. I put the car in gear and drove away.

After we had driven down the block and out of sight, I asked, "Are you okay Carmen?" She just nodded. "I'm not sure what was going on at Sandy's, but I sure am proud of you for getting yourself out of there."

"It was terrible—they were both talking about sneaking out at night to go to some party with some boys they just met yesterday! No way I was going, but I didn't want them to think I was a goody-two-shoes, either. Thanks for coming and getting me, Mom."

Much later that night, after staying up with Carmen and talking some more, I lay awake in my bed: Should I call Sandy's parents? Carmen had done the right thing in a tough situation, and now I had a similar choice to make.

This mom did a wonderful job of meeting her daughter halfway, and so did her daughter by meeting her mom at the same place. But doing so is never a free ride, as we see how the mom was left holding the anxiety far into the night, long after her daughter had fallen asleep. And this is just one more reason why parenting a teenager is the toughest job you'll ever have.

Your teenager counts on your quiet presence and deep confidence in her more than she can or will ever tell you. And when you see this for yourself, it becomes easier and easier to listen to her more deeply and to reassure her more concisely, which in turn deepens the connection between the two of you.

More on: Communicating with Teens