



Protecting Teens From Property Theft in Schools: Tips for Adults

By the age of 17, 43 percent of youth in the United States have stolen property worth \$50 or less.¹

Many of today's teens carry a variety of technological devices, such as mp3 players, cell phones, digital cameras, portable gaming systems, etc. These items are often targets of theft in schools. Such items as school books and clothing can be targets of theft as well.

In 2006, "high school students were more likely to experience property crime than fights at school."²

Preventing Property Theft

Theft in schools may sour students' feelings about their school environment or make them feel unsafe. While many schools have security personnel on site, some schools rely on teachers and administrators to police the halls. Regardless of the level of security, it's important to teach teens to prevent theft.

- Remind teens to keep their lockers locked. Tell them not to keep money or anything valuable in their lockers, especially overnight.
- Tell teens to lock their bikes and not to leave their bikes in isolated areas.

- Don't leave backpacks, purses, other bags, or anything valuable unattended during school hours or at an afterschool meeting or practice.
- Consider leaving valuables, especially expensive electronics, at home. If teens do bring their electronics to school, tell them to write down the serial numbers beforehand and make sure they don't leave valuables in backpacks or on desks.
- Tell teens to keep valuables locked out of sight in their car's trunk or glove compartments.

Recovering Stolen Property

Stolen property is hard to recover, but there are cases in which stolen property is found and turned over to the appropriate authorities. If teens take appropriate steps before and after a theft, they might be able to retrieve their valuables.

- Tell teens to keep a record of all of the valuables they bring to school. This includes the item's color, make, model, serial number, and any other identifying information. Teens may even want to take a picture of each item to keep with the list (and give a copy of the list to their parents).
- Take part in Operation ID, a nationwide theft prevention program. Teens mark property with an identifying number to make it less desirable to thieves—the number makes it harder to resell the item. The number also helps police locate the owner if the stolen property is recovered. Teens can have items engraved, or write their names in permanent ink on the inside labels of clothing. Since many items of clothing (particularly accessories) are lost rather than stolen, having a name on them may aid in their safe return.
- Immediately report a theft to school resource officers, school security staff, or other law enforcement. When reporting a theft, remember to note the date, time, and location of the incident. If someone else witnessed the theft, ask for the person's full name and contact information for the police report. Prompt reporting is an important factor in recovering stolen items and in catching the thief.

Protecting Teens

Keeping Schools Safe

Teens can also take part in school crime watches and safety and prevention education programs to help protect their property and prevent theft. School crime watches work when students watch out for one another and report any crimes that they hear about or witness. When students in a school start and run a school crime watch, they send the message that “crime is not tolerated here.” To learn more about starting a school crime watch at your teen’s school, visit the Youth Crime Watch of America website at www.ycwa.org.

Students can also start a student safety program, such as Youth Safety Corps (YSC). YSC provides youth interested in public safety and crime prevention an opportunity to engage in ongoing, active participation in crime prevention. Youth partner with school resource officers, school personnel, and community volunteers to assess and analyze safety and security issues within their schools and communities that contribute to youth crime and victimization. Youth Safety Corps teams then address those issues by implementing such projects as painting over graffiti on the walls of a school, developing presentations to teach children about theft or bullying, or surveying students about their attitudes toward underage drinking. For more information about Youth Safety Corps, visit www.ncpc.org/tcc.

Adults can also engage teens in prevention education. Teens can participate in the *Community Works* program to learn about crime and victimization prevention, engage in critical thinking and problem-solving activities, and participate in service-learning projects. *Community Works* sessions are designed to teach youth how to examine violence and law-related issues in the context of their schools and communities and then apply what they learn to real-life circumstances. Students learn about the different types of crime, the costs and consequences of crime, conflict management strategies, how crime affects communities, and what community prevention programs and services are available to them. Issues such as theft, bullying, dating violence, gangs, substance abuse, underage drinking, and police-youth relations are also explored. To learn more about the *Community Works* curriculum, visit www.ncpc.org/tcc.

Learn More About Preventing Theft

For more information about preventing theft in schools, check out the National Crime Prevention Council's Anti-theft Campaign at www.ncpc.org/preventtheft.

1 Snyder, Howard N., and Melissa Sickmund. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2006 <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/nr2006/downloads/nr2006.pdf>

2 Ibid. 73.



TCC
Teens, Crime, and
the Community

National Crime Prevention Council

2345 Crystal Drive, Fifth Floor

Arlington, VA 22202

www.ncpc.org/tcc

202-466-6272