



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.



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 Teens, Crime, and
TCC the Community



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A Teen's Guide to Protecting Portable Property

Are you a teen who owns a cell phone, a portable music player, or the latest CDs? How about a calculator, a digital camera, or a popular brand of athletic gear? Do you bring these items with you to school and leave them in your backpack or store them in your locker while you are in class, at lunch, or in the gym?

If your answer to these questions is yes, then answer one more: Do you know how to protect your personal property so that it goes home in your backpack at the end of the day and not in someone else's?

Odds are that you or someone you know has had personal property stolen while at school or a school event. Statistics show that young people ages 12 to 17 are far more likely to be victims of property crimes than adults, and most of the crimes occur on school grounds. The majority of these thefts are never reported to police or school officials.



Protect Yourself

How To Prevent Theft

It's unfortunate, but some people steal. Yet protecting your portable property doesn't mean you can't have it with you or enjoy it. It does mean taking steps to ensure that this property is carefully watched or secured at all times. Here are some approaches that will help keep you from being a victim of property crime.

Don't Bring Valuables to School

If you don't absolutely need something during the school day, leave it at home. Keep only as much cash in your wallet or purse as you need in one day. Remember, most schools have an "at your own risk" policy when it comes to bringing money and expensive items to school and will take no responsibility for your losses.

Avoid Calling Attention to Your Valuables

Playing cool ring tones on your cell phone might amuse your lunch buddies, but it can also mean unwanted attention from people around you who you don't know. If you listen to your portable music player on your way to and from school, tuck it in a pocket or keep it out of sight. And don't brag about how much your new basketball sneakers cost at the mall.

Never Leave Your Valuables Unattended

Most items are stolen because they are left unattended. If you toss your backpack on a table while you get in the lunch line or leave it on the

bench next to your gym locker, either your backpack or an item inside it may be missing when you return. If you must leave your belongings for a few minutes, ask a friend to watch them until you return.

Secure Your Locker at All Times

Many students report that their belongings are stolen from lockers. Lockers can be broken into easily, especially if they are not properly closed. Make sure your locker is shut tightly at the top, in the middle, and at the bottom. Request a different one if it is not working properly. Always keep it locked and do not share your combination with anyone. Gym lockers are the most vulnerable to theft because they are often left unlocked, and changing rooms are usually not monitored by security cameras or guards.

Protect Valuables That You Leave in Your Car

If you drive to school, never leave valuables in plain view inside your car, even if you keep it locked. Put them in the trunk or at least out of sight. Buy radios, mp3, and CD players that can be removed and locked in the trunk. Remember, school parking lots are often deserted during the school day and car thieves know this.

Educate Yourself

How To Recover Stolen Items

Although many stolen items are never recovered, there is always a chance that stolen items will fall into the authorities' hands. If you take certain steps before and after a theft, you just might get a prized item returned to you.

Keep a List of All Your Valuables

One of the best ways you can assist the police in recovering your stolen property is by keeping records. Make a list of all of your valuables. Write down a full description of each item including color, make, model, serial numbers, and any other identifiers. You might want to take a picture of each item to keep with the list. Make several copies of the list and give one to your parents.

Take Part in Operation ID

Operation ID is a nationwide theft prevention program that involves marking property with an identifying number to make it less desirable to thieves, who will have trouble selling it, and to help police locate the owner if the stolen property is recovered. You will need an engraver to mark your personal property. These are often available free of charge from neighborhood watch programs and other groups.

Some items can be ordered from the manufacturer already engraved with personal identifying information such as your initials. If allowed by your school, write your name in the front cover of your textbooks. Use indelible ink to write your name on the inside labels of your gym clothing, jackets, and accessories such as hats and gloves. Many items are lost rather than stolen, and having your name on them will bring them safely back to you.

Immediately Report a Theft to Authorities

If something that belongs to you is stolen, report the theft immediately to school authorities, your parents, and the police. Be sure 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 report. Prompt reporting is an important factor in recovering stolen items and in catching the thief so he or she does not commit more crimes.

Start a School Watch Program

You may have heard of Neighborhood Watch, where neighbors watch out for each other and report crime in their neighborhoods. A school crime watch works the same way. Students watch out for each other to make the entire school safer and more enjoyable. They learn how to keep from becoming victims. They also learn the best ways to report theft and suspicious activities.

When students in a school start and run a crime watch program, they are saying, "Crime is not tolerated here." Talk to your school principal about starting a program at your school. A national organization called Youth Crime Watch of America can also provide you with information on starting a school crime watch. Visit their website, www.ycwa.org, or call them at 305-670-2409 for more information.

**Like your stuff? You're not the only one.
Remember to keep your things safe.
Lock them up.**

For more information on protecting portable property and preventing crime visit...

The **National Crime Prevention Council** (www.ncpc.org) for resources on preventing theft, preventing teen victimization, witnessing and reporting crimes, and much more.



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