

# MONTANA

## Survival Guide for Parents of Teens

### ▶ AT-A-GLANCE

▶ **Project Characteristics**  
Resource Guide for Parents of Teen Drivers

▶ **Program Areas**  
Youth Programs

▶ **Targeted Populations**  
Parents of Missoula County Teens

▶ **Type of Jurisdiction**  
County

▶ **Jurisdiction Size**  
100,000

▶ **Funding**  
Contributions from:  
Traffic Safety Task Force of Missoula City/Co Health Dept;  
Missoula PTA Council;  
TCI Cablevision;  
Buttrey Food & Drug;  
Missoula Dist. Court Judges;  
Morgenroth Music;  
Community Medical Cntr;  
Turning Point Addiction Treatment;  
Community Care;  
St. Patrick Hospital

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## Problem Identification

The teen years can be tough, especially for parents whose teenagers are exhibiting unsafe behaviors. Often these parents lack knowledge regarding warning signs, what actions to take, and community resources available to help them. Even when parents are able to identify a problem, they often feel helpless to intervene and try to change a teen's behavior.

Some teens in Missoula County exhibit unsafe driving behaviors. Experts point out that this unsafe behavior is not isolated, but interrelated. Many teens who are risk-taking drivers also exhibit risky behaviors in other areas of their lives. Therefore, focusing solely on unsafe driving behavior is too narrow a scope. The scope needs to include all areas of risky or unhealthy teen activity to understand and resolve the problem.

## Goals and Objectives

The goal of the *Survival Guide for Parents of Teens* project is to improve interaction between parents and teens by providing parents with basic knowledge and various strategies for encouraging teens to change risky behaviors, including, but not limited to, unsafe driving behaviors. The project's objectives include:

- Encourage parents to continue parenting, stay involved, and not give up on their teens;
- Educate parents about risks and consequences, how to recognize unsafe driving warning signs, including alcohol or drug impaired driving, "cruising" after curfew, not using safety belts, distracted driving such as driving while smoking or listening to music, and other areas in which teens put themselves, and others at risk; and
- Provide parents with a community resource listing.

## Strategies and Activities

The *Survival Guide for Parents of Teens* project implemented the following strategies to achieve its goals and objectives:

- Consulted and collaborate with 14 area professionals who interact with youth including law enforcement, health department personnel, clinical psychologists, school district administrators, addiction treatment counselors, juvenile court staff, Planned Parenthood, out-of-home youth placement coordinators, and youth resource agencies.
- Outlined all areas in which teens engage in risky behaviors such as alcohol and other drugs, risky driving, shoplifting, gang activity, eating disorders, depression, suicidal tendencies, sexual activity, runaway, unhealthy relationships, and problems in school.

- Developed a 20-page booklet to provide support for parents. The guidebook covers warning signs, what to do about them, and ways to engage teens in community activities. The guidebook also includes risk and protective factors, tips on parenting teens, area resources and partners, being a good role model, avoiding enabling, developing consequences, and a suggested reading list.
- Included a feedback form on the booklet's last page to gather input from parents.
- Solicited funding from area businesses.
- Asked community professionals to review the booklet to review information, evaluate parent comments, make needed changes, and incorporate new information before subsequent printings.
- Made the booklet available on the County Health Department web page at [www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthpromo](http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthpromo). It can also be accessed from the Safe Kids/Safe Communities web page. The website also includes a *Survival Guide* in PDF format.
- Targeted parents of eighth graders to give them a head-start in understanding issues that appear in ninth grade.

## Results

The *Survival Guide for Parents of Teens* achieved the following results:

- Received a favorable review in *The Missoulian*, an area newspaper that published an editorial supporting the *Survival Guide* and encouraged parents to read it
- Received numerous requests for more copies from agencies in the community that distribute the booklet
- Printed 32,000 copies and distributed 23,000 to parents of eighth graders at parent/teacher conferences and to all area agencies dealing with youth such as police and sheriff's departments, area hospitals, youth agencies, and juvenile courts
- Received positive and encouraging feedback from parents, such as:
  - "This was so readable, so supportive, and so helpful!"
  - "Appropriate responses for parents, in different situations."
  - "Very encouraging."
  - "Very informative and useful."
  - "A great resource."

Perhaps the highest praise of the *Survival Guide* is that youth and health advocates in other communities have adapted the *Survival Guide* to use with teens in their communities.