

Talking to Teens about Safety at Work:
A Guide
for **Parents**





Introduction

If you're like many parents, you probably worry more about your child getting to work on time than about what goes on when he or she gets there.

An injury at work? Couldn't happen, right?

Wrong. Work can be a dangerous place for your kids. In 2006, **more than 3,400 workers between the ages of 15 and 19 were hurt seriously enough to need time off work.** That's almost *ten a day* for every day of the year.

And, what's even worse, **10 of them died on the job.***

If you have teens that work, don't just wait for something bad to happen. There are things you can teach them, and questions you can ask, to help them come home safe.

What should you say to your kids?

This guide will give you some of the tools you need to feel comfortable talking about safety with your child.

It will give you **general knowledge** about workplace health and safety. It will arm you with **specific knowledge** about hazards your teen might find at work.

***Don't wait.
Start the discussion
about workplace
safety today.***

LEFT Julia with mother
June, WSIB employee.

*figure for young workers aged 15-24



What helps make a workplace safe?

It's not the absence of hazards — in fact, some of the most potentially dangerous workplaces are among the safest places to work, because everyone there has learned how to work safely.

Research shows **a number of factors contribute to keeping a workplace safe.**

CULTURE

Do workers and management value safety? When there's a rush job, do employees cut corners, or do they work methodically and safely? Are people who wear protective equipment considered careful, or are they mocked for being too cautious? **People's attitudes, values, and day-to-day actions** — especially those of the employer — affect workplace health and safety.

TRAINING

Training won't make a dangerous workplace any safer, but it's one of the most significant ways to prevent injuries. **Health and safety training is important for everyone**, but especially for young workers without much previous training or experience.

SUPERVISION

The quality of supervision young workers receive has a major impact on whether or not they get hurt. Supervisors (people with authority over your teen, but not necessarily “the boss”) must provide workplace safety information and hazard training, and closely monitor workers to correct unsafe habits.

Attitudes and values affect workplace safety.



Why are teen workers at risk?

Statistics show that young workers are at least **10% more likely** to have an injury at work, and that most injuries happen during the first year on the job. *Why?*

THE NATURE OF THE WORK THEY DO

Teen jobs are often part-time, temporary, or seasonal. In these kinds of jobs, supervisors may be under-trained or overworked — not to mention young themselves. And quite often, staff just haven't worked together long enough for a safe work culture to develop.

THEIR LACK OF EXPERIENCE

Workers in their first month on the job are more than **five times as likely to get hurt**, whether they're 17 or 47. But when you consider that most teens change jobs frequently, you can start to see how being constantly “new on the job” can get them in trouble.

THEIR EAGERNESS TO PLEASE

Teens may be too concerned about looking like they can't do the job to ask questions about safety. Or they may feel **if they speak up they'll have their hours cut or they'll get fired**. This can lead to a critical communication gap when it comes to safety.

THE WAY THEY THINK ABOUT RISK

If a young worker has been told something is dangerous, but has seen someone else do it without getting into trouble, he or she will probably think it's not as risky as it seems. “Nothing bad happened, so it won't happen to me.” This attitude can unnecessarily expose teens to hazards.

What workplace hazards should your teen look out for?

You may already be familiar with workplace hazards, but kids just entering the workforce may not have that knowledge. Here's a primer on the **five types of hazards**.

1. PHYSICAL HAZARDS

Heights (from which your teen could fall), falling objects, and machinery are the most common causes of serious injuries. Other physical hazards include motor vehicles (such as cars, trucks, or forklifts), extreme temperatures, electricity, and high noise levels.

2. CHEMICAL HAZARDS

Some chemicals can explode or burn, causing immediate injury. Long-term exposure to others can cause serious future illness.

3. BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Things like bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi can cause disease. These hazards may come from animals, insects, people (think coughs and sneezes), or contaminated surfaces and liquids. The danger is especially high when contaminated objects break the skin.

4. ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

Ergonomic hazards can injure your teen's muscles, joints, and tendons — for example, using of a lot of force, repeating movements, or holding one position for a long time can cause sprains and strains, or chronic conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome.

5. PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

These hazards relate to people and their feelings and behaviours. Stress, verbal harassment, and bullying are all examples of psychosocial hazards.

How can hazards be controlled?

Controlling the five types of hazards is a tricky business, but you and your teen can familiarize yourselves with three general ways to go about it.

CONTROLLING HAZARDS “AT THE SOURCE”

Eliminating or totally isolating a hazard is the best way. Some ways this can be done are:

- ❑ Redesigning a work process.
- ❑ Buying less hazardous equipment.
- ❑ Adding safety features to existing machines, or
- ❑ Replacing dangerous substances or processes with safer ones.

CONTROLLING HAZARDS “ALONG THE PATH”

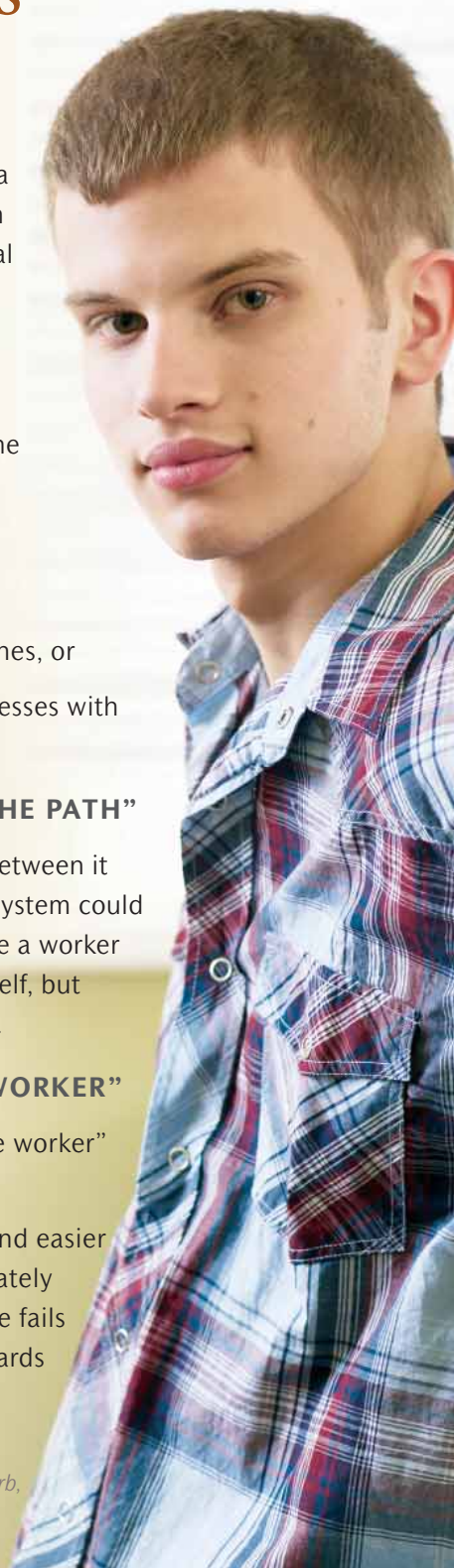
Often you can control a hazard by getting between it and the worker. For example, a ventilation system could remove a toxic substance from the air before a worker breathes it — not eliminating the hazard itself, but preventing the worker from being hurt by it.

CONTROLLING HAZARDS “AT THE WORKER”

A face mask is a good example of an “at the worker” control.

These kinds of controls are often cheaper and easier to put in place than some others. Unfortunately they’re also the least effective. When all else fails they can keep workers safe, but ideally hazards should be controlled before this stage.

*Steven, son of Barb,
WSIB employee.*





What can teens do to stay safe?

Teens can learn about hazards and how to control them, but it's just as important for them to know they have legal rights when it comes to workplace safety.

Like all workers in Ontario, teens have:

- The right to know** about hazards they may be exposed to at work.
- The right to participate** in making their work safer.
- The right to refuse unsafe work** if they believe the work is dangerous.

LEFT *Tim, WSIB supplier, with sons Tomas and David.*



Teens have legal rights in the workplace

More information on all of these rights, as well as others that are specific to particular industries, can be found on the Ministry of Labour's **WorkSmart Ontario** website, wsib.on.ca or youngworker.ca.

These sites also link to important information about hazards and how to recognize them, and about how to make sure your teen gets the training he or she needs — whether your teen is about to start a new job or is already working, it's definitely worth going online.

See 'Resources' on the back for more information.



What are employers required to do to keep teens safe?

Employers and supervisors have legal obligations when it comes to workplace safety.

For **employers**, that means things like:

- Making sure that your teen is given **health and safety training** and has all necessary safety equipment,
- Ensuring your teen and his or her supervisor **know about hazards** and how to work safely, and
- Taking **every reasonable precaution** to try to keep your teen and his or her coworkers from getting hurt.

Employers must also post health and safety information where workers can read them — such as the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, the WSIB's *In Case of Injury at Work* poster, Ministry of Labour (MOL) reports, and names of workplace health and safety representatives.

A **supervisor** is responsible for:

- Ensuring your teen **follows the law** and the company's safety rules,
- Making sure your teen works safely and knows how to use — and actually uses — any **required safety equipment**,
- Telling your teen about any **potential or real hazards**, and
- Like employers, taking **every reasonable precaution** to try to keep workers from getting hurt.

Again, more information on all these obligations and responsibilities is available on the MOL's **WorkSmart Ontario** website. Check the Resources section on the back of this guide for more information.

How can you help protect your teen?

Now that you know about how teens work and hazards they may face — take action!

TALK TO YOUR TEEN

Start by asking what your teen does in a typical day, or what equipment he or she uses. Be casual about it and ask at the dinner table, or in the car, or while you're watching the game. What kind of hazards is your teen exposed to? Are there ways to control them?

Ask questions about your teen's workplace, such as:

- How much **safety training** did you get?
- Are you **shown how** to do all the tasks you're assigned, including any new tasks since you were hired?
- Are you required to wear **safety equipment**? When?
- Is there a safety rep. or **joint health & safety committee**?

Most importantly, try to find out if there's a **good health and safety culture** at work.

- Does the boss encourage people to **ask questions**, or report hazards when they find them?
- Do people take shortcuts when they're in a hurry?
- Do coworkers seem to **follow safety rules** and wear safety equipment? For example, if you see high heels where safety shoes would be appropriate, make a note and talk to your teen.

VISIT THE WORKPLACE

Your teen would probably be horrified if you just showed up and started inspecting the premises. Why not pop in to say 'hello', or show up early to offer a ride home from work, and pay attention while you're there?

- Do you see things that could cause **trips and falls**? The workplace should look tidy and well taken care of.





- ❑ **CHEMICALS:** **Are there chemicals used?** Containers should be labelled with contents and hazard information, and safely stored. Special precautions are needed for flammable chemicals. Odours don't necessarily mean hazards, but if you're concerned you could talk to your teen later.
- ❑ **MACHINERY:** Ask about 3 essentials: **training, machine guards,** and **'lockout' procedures.**
- ❑ **HEIGHTS:** Are ladders used safely? Are there **guardrails and fall protection,** such as harnesses, where required?
- ❑ **NOISE:** **How noisy is it?** If you can't hear people speaking, your teen should be wearing **hearing protection.**

ABOVE Joanne, WSIB employee,
with niece Karli.



Kevin, husband of Barb, WSIB employee, with daughter Sarah.

What can you do if you think a job is unsafe?

If you've got the sinking feeling that your child is working in a dangerous job, you're probably scared, confused, or angry. Here's what to do next.

LET YOUR KIDS KNOW THEY HAVE YOUR SUPPORT

You may find that talking about your teen's job actually increases your worries, or that it causes your teen stress. Try to remember that it's better to have these conversations than not.

Make sure to mention your teen's rights and responsibilities at work — and ***especially the right to refuse work that he or she thinks isn't safe.***

ENCOURAGE YOUR TEEN TO TALK TO A SUPERVISOR

Your child actually has a legal responsibility to tell a supervisor about workplace hazards he or she has discovered. He or she may need support from you to get over the fear of talking to the boss, but try to help your teen see that **employers need their workers to ask questions and report unsafe conditions.**

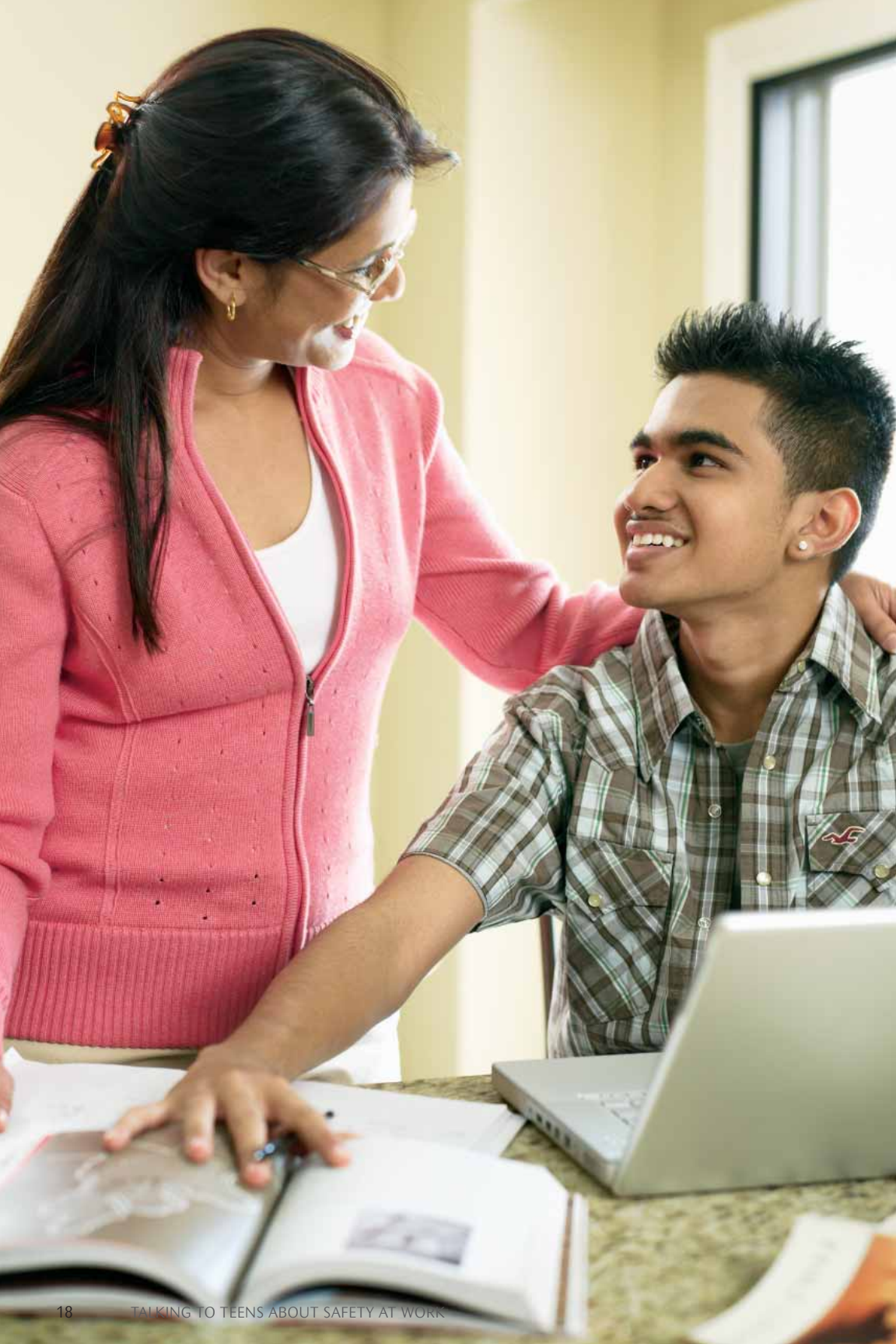
REPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR

If your safety concerns aren't addressed, you or your teen might consider calling the **Ministry of Labour (MOL)**. The MOL can send an inspector to help ensure workers — and your son or daughter — are protected. Please see 'Resources' on the back.

MAKE A JUDGEMENT CALL

No job is worth getting hurt or dying for. It's possible that your teen's job is so unsafe that it's better for him or her just to quit and walk away.

How can you know if your teen's job crosses this line? Use your judgement, and trust your hunches. **Remember, if something feels wrong, it probably is.**



Conclusion

If there's one thing you can do to help keep your teen safe, it's this — start talking to him or her about safety. Despite what it may seem like at times, your child relies on your guidance and direction. You play a crucial role.

Don't be embarrassed to make safety a priority. You might think it will be hard to talk to your teen about working safely, or uncomfortable to go to his or her workplace, but when you think about the alternative — getting that horrible phone call that says your child has been hurt or killed — it suddenly starts to look a whole lot easier to do.

***Don't be
embarrassed
to make safety
a priority.***

LEFT Mahesh, WSIB
employee, with son Shiva.

Resources

For health and safety information or to comment on this guide:

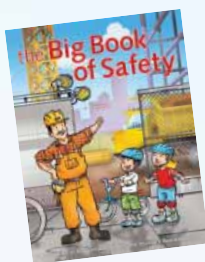
- Email your questions or comments to info@youngworker.ca, or
- Call the Prevention Hotline at 1-888-921-WSIB (9742).

To report unsafe conditions about a workplace to the Ministry of Labour (MOL):

- Call the MOL Hotline at 1-800-268-8013, or
- Call the nearest MOL office. Check their website for the phone number: www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/about/reg_offices.html.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

- www.prevent-it.ca
- www.youngworker.ca
- www.wsib.on.ca
- www.labour.gov.on.ca
- www.worksmartontario.gov.on.ca
- www.ywap.ca
- www.preventiondynamics.ca
- www.nofunbeingdead.com
- www.notworthit.ca
- www.worksafebc.com
- www.wcb.ab.ca/workingsafely



For younger kids, check out our colouring book. To order go to prevention pages, www.wsib.on.ca

One of the most important rights your teen has is the right to refuse unsafe work. No job is worth getting seriously hurt or dying for. Find out more on pages 8 and 15, and on the resource websites listed on this page. **Really worried about things your kid is being asked to do at work? Call here:**

**WSIB Prevention Young Worker Hotline:
1-866-SAFE-JOB (723-3562)**