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SCHOOL TOOLS

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ADDRESSING SAFETY

From the moment a child is born (and often even before), parents are given safety tips to ensure their child remains protected and has the chance to develop into a healthy adult. We are told to support a child's head, to child-proof our homes, to install baby monitors so we can intervene if something goes wrong. As they age, we teach them about stranger danger, to look both ways when crossing the street, and "safe touch" boundaries. We introduce D.A.R.E. programs in schools and practice drills for earthquakes and fires. But as times change, technology expands and kids face more daily stressors, we have new safety concerns that arise: Is my child safe at school? Will my child's school be the next on the news for an act of violence? What if my child is partaking in something dangerous online that I don't know about?

The most important steps a parent, educator or school staff member can take are to educate themselves, be observant, and communicate. There are ways of allowing a sense of personal freedom and learning from mistakes while still protecting students. In this article, we will briefly cover the topics of observing your school's safety routines and the dangers of social media challenges. We encourage you to reach out to Saint Louis Counseling if you need extra support.

A Guide to School Safety

Scholastic shared six rules for parents when addressing school safety, recommended by the National Association of Elementary School Principals:

1. **Learn the school's emergency procedures.** These are often listed in your school's handbook or in the classrooms.
2. **Know travel routes to and from school.** Make sure your child knows both primary and alternate routes in case of a future emergency.
3. **Look for school security measures.** These may include having to be buzzed into the building, or wearing a visitor pass.
4. **Talk with your child about safety.** Have a list of emergency numbers for your child to have on hand when away from you.
5. **Inform school staff.** Just as you'd let them know about a serious allergy, keep staff and teachers in the loop about mental health concerns as well.
6. **Get involved.** Talk to the principal about safety measures, form a parent group, make yourself present at school events.

SOCIAL MEDIA "CHALLENGES"

By now, many of us are aware of various social media fads, or "challenges", that have come up over the years. Some are harmless and provide a sense of unity or fun, i.e. the Ice Bucket Challenge for ALS awareness or the recent Flip The Switch dance challenge. However, with the popularity of newer apps rising (i.e. Tik Tok), along with a generation of kids and teens who were bored at home during a pandemic, we have seen a new series of more harmful and concerning challenges take flight.

These challenges encourage dangerous or unkind acts in the hopes one will "go viral" on social media, gain a following, and thus a sense of belonging with others. One recent social media challenge, the "outlet challenge", encouraged kids to create sparks from an outlet with a phone charger and penny, risking a home fire or electrocution.

Another was the MoMo challenge, which used fear of the character "MoMo" to encourage children towards suicidal acts or self harm. You may also remember the well-known Tide Pod challenge - daring kids to "eat clean" by consuming Tide Pods, or the challenge of stacking milk crates to dangerous heights and attempting to make it across them. Reaching new levels of concern was the school shooting challenge of this past week, where students were encouraged to make threats of violence to their schools for a day called "National Shoot Up Your School Day".

With these trends on the rise, it is so important for parents to **educate** yourselves, **monitor** social media usage, **communicate** with your child, and be **observant** to changes in your child's mental health or behaviors. If it helps to talk to your school's therapist about your concerns, please reach out.