

Safety

Awareness, prevention, caution, action

"You have the right to be safe and a responsibility to help make it happen."

Barbara Lewis

Did you know that teens are crime targets more often than any other age group? Every 19 seconds, a teen somewhere in the United States is a victim of a crime. Did you know that 50 percent of automobile deaths could be prevented if passengers wore seat belts? That it costs about \$500 to replace a broken school window? That removing graffiti from school doors and walls can cost taxpayers (including your parents) \$3,400 for each separate incident?¹

Although some adults might dismiss you as "just a kid," there's a lot you can do to make the world a safer place by preventing crime in your neighborhood, community, and school. You shouldn't feel responsible for keeping everyone safe, but you shouldn't feel *excluded* from helping because of your age. When you work to make things safer for others, you make things safer for yourself, too.

Becoming more safety-conscious, promoting safety, and doing your part to work for safety are all good habits to develop. You can focus your efforts and energies on one (or many) safety-related areas, including:

1. Crime prevention. You might decide to concentrate on:

- alcohol and drug abuse
- animal abuse

¹ Sources: National Crime Prevention Council and National Safety Council.

- arson
- child abuse and neglect
- curfew violations
- drunk driving
- environmental abuse
- graffiti
- kidnapping
- murder
- robbery/burglary/theft
- runaways
- sexual assault
- sexual harassment
- suicide
- truancy
- vandalism
- violence against people
- violence against property
- what else?

"There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time."

Calvin Coolidge

2. Accident prevention. You could consider getting involved with:

- home safety (fire prevention, safe use of electricity, carbon monoxide, pesticides, poison prevention, etc.)



- neighborhood/community safety (sidewalks, playgrounds, traffic control, pedestrian walkways, public parks)
 - preventing freak accidents
 - sport/recreation safety (swimming, boating, biking, hunting, camping, climbing, walking, etc.)
 - travel safety (automobile, bus, school bus, train, air travel, etc.)
 - what else?
- 3. Disease prevention.** You might work to prevent disease by promoting:
- affordable health insurance
 - anti-smoking efforts
 - childhood immunizations
 - clean water/air
 - free or low-cost community clinics
 - alleviating local or world hunger
 - public awareness of alcohol and drug abuse
 - public awareness of communicable diseases
 - what else?
- 4. Disaster prevention and preparation.** You could help to educate people about:
- droughts
 - earthquakes
 - fires

- floods
- hurricanes
- landslides
- tornadoes
- volcanoes
- what else?

5. National safety. On behalf of your own country and other countries around the world, you might speak out about and work against:

- germ warfare
- landmines
- nuclear attacks
- what else?

“The world’s children deserve to walk the earth in safety.”

President Bill Clinton

On the local level, you can encourage your family to develop safe habits. You can be watchful and careful about the things you do on your own and with friends. You can work to reduce crime in your school. You have the right to learn in a safe environment free from bullying, vandalism, violence, drugs and alcohol, and discipline problems. Unsafe and problem situations are created by only a small number of students. Imagine what might happen if the rest of you spoke out and took action to create a safe, supportive, nurturing school.

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

1 You’re passing a frozen pond when you hear someone screaming for help who has fallen through the ice. The victim is too far from shore for you to reach out a hand, and if you walk onto the ice you’ll probably fall through, too. The victim’s head is bobbing in the water, and the temperature is below freezing. What might you do? How might you work to prevent such accidents in the future?

2 You have a friend who's being pressured to join a gang. She has told you that this Friday after school, gang members will "jump" her—a form of initiation. You've warned your friend to take another way home, but she thinks it's too late to do anything about the gang. She doesn't feel she has any choice about joining, and she has warned you to mind your own business or else. What's your responsibility here? Do you have one? Should you consider your safety, too, if you decide to get involved?

3 Following a highly competitive basketball game at another school (your team won), you and your friends are piling into a car to drive home. You notice that there are eight riders but only six seat belts. If you don't go with them, you'll be left alone, and you might be in danger of being bullied (or worse) by students from the other school. If you do go with them, someone—maybe you—will be riding without a seat belt. What might you do? What might you do in the future to prevent situations like this one from happening?

4 You're baby-sitting late one night when you hear someone tampering with the lock on the back door. Then you hear a back window slide open. You reach for the phone line, but the phone is dead. You could slip out the front door and run to a neighbor's house, but there are four children sleeping upstairs. What might you do? What might you do in the future to prevent situations like this one from happening?

5 Your best friend's father has a gun rack and keeps loaded guns in the house for protection. You know that your friend sometimes sneaks one of his father's guns and shoots birds. Should you say something to your friend? To your friend's father? To your parents? Or should you mind your own business? What other options might you have?

6 You're hiking with some friends who start climbing in a slick, dangerous, rocky area. You get a "gut feeling" of uneasiness about it. If you refuse to go with them, they'll make fun of you and they might leave you behind. Besides, you've brought rock climbing equipment along, and you know how to use it. Your feeling of uneasiness is probably just your imagination . . . at least, that's what you tell yourself. Do you "trust your gut" or not? What might you do?

Activities

WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL² about safety issues that concern you. What worries you most at home, at school, in your neighborhood, in your community, in your nation, in the world?

Variation: Choose one of your worries and turn it into a project. Set goals for yourself so you can turn your project into a reality.³

WRITE A JINGLE ABOUT SAFETY and set it to music. Make a recording of your jingle and ask a local radio station to play it as a public service announcement (PSA) for a day, week, or month. Or perform it over your school's PA system.

CREATE A FLYER ABOUT POISON SAFETY to educate others about the dangers.

1. Contact your local poison control center (look in the front of your phone book under Emergency Numbers). Or call information (411) and ask for the number. (If your town doesn't have a poison control center, getting one started would be a great project for your class, club, or school.) Ask for information (statistics) on poisonings in your town, city, or state. The poison control center might have a pamphlet or news release to send you.

2. Write your flyer. Include:

- ☒ the telephone number of the poison control center
- ☒ some of the statistics provided by the poison control center
- ☒ advice on what to say when reporting a possible poisoning (give your name, phone number, and address where you are; give the name of the substance—have the container in front of you when you call; the amount taken; the person's current condition or symptoms—vomiting? difficulty breathing? other symptoms?)
- ☒ safety tips on storing poisonous or potentially harmful substances (cleaning supplies, medications, solvents, etc.) in the home.

² See "Endurance," pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources.

³ See "Purpose," pages 195–197, for goal-setting steps and "Responsibility," page 227, for planning steps.

3. Make copies of your flyer to distribute to your neighbors, community centers, churches, schools, stores (ask permission first), and other places that are willing to take them and hand them out.

Variation: Create a flyer about fire safety, swimming safety, bicycle safety, home safety, or any other topic that interests you.

PLAN AND CARRY OUT A CAMPAIGN to promote the use of seat belts. Visit your library or contact the National Safety Council and gather statistics on motor vehicle-related injuries and deaths related to *not* using seat belts. Make a poster showing how seat belts work; create a flyer or pamphlet about seat belt safety to hand out. Contact a local automobile dealership to see if there's a seat belt available that you can use for demonstrations.

CHECK IT OUT



National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive
Itasca, IL 60143-3201
(630) 285-1121
1-800-621-7615

www.nsc.org

Contact the National Safety Council for information on motor vehicle-related injuries and deaths and seat belt use. Visit the Web site to learn more about seat belt safety.

PLAN AND CARRY OUT A CAMPAIGN to encourage kids to wear bicycle helmets. Visit your library or search the Internet for the latest statistics on bicycle injuries and deaths; learn how many school-age bikers use helmets. Graph the statistics you find. Learn if laws in your area require bikers to wear helmets. Create a brochure or flyer about bicycle helmet safety; see if local retailers will offer discounts on helmets.

Variation: Perform a skit or puppet show for younger kids on bicycle safety in general.

CHECK IT OUT



The Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute

4611 Seventh Street South
Arlington, VA 22204-1419
(703) 486-0100

www.helmets.org

Contact this nonprofit, consumer-funded advocacy program for tips on buying bicycle helmets, help for organizers of helmet programs, helmet-related statistics, and more.

PLAN AND CARRY OUT A CAMPAIGN to immunize children against childhood diseases.⁴ Call your local health department and ask if you can make phone calls, set up a shuttle service, distribute brochures, or help out in other ways.

MAKE EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER cards for your family, class, club, or youth group. Include local numbers for police emergency, fire, poison control, suicide prevention, etc. (TIP: You can find local emergency numbers at the front of your telephone book.) You might also list some national hotlines.⁵ If possible, laminate the cards to make them more durable.

LEARN EMERGENCY FIRST AID. Invite someone from your local health department, fire department, or safety department to come to your class to train you in emergency first aid and CPR. Or take a course at your local community school, health department, Red Cross chapter, YMCA, or YWCA and learn to be a trainer. Then you can train other people at home, at school, and in your community.

HOLD A SAFETY FAIR at your school.⁶ Invite representatives from the fire department, police department, safety council, recreation council, school district, and anyone else who is concerned with safety to put up displays. Invite other safety experts to make presentations.

Variation: Work with your class or school to write a School Safety Proclamation. Put it on a poster, decorate it, and display it in the front hall of your school (or someplace else where students, teachers, and visitors will see it often). The proclamation could state your reasons for wanting a safe school.

⁴ See "Health," page 107, for a related suggestion and resource.

⁵ See "Endurance," pages 87-88, for national hotlines.

⁶ See also the *Days of Respect* resource on page 221.

CHECK IT OUT**National School Safety Center**

141 Duesenberg Drive, Suite 7B

Westlake Village, CA 91362

(805) 373-9977

www.schoolsafety.us

The NSSC offers helpful booklets and videos addressing violence prevention, bullying, and conflict resolution for educators and parents.

START A CRIME CLUE BOX at your school. Here's how:⁷

1. Cover a large shoe box or other cardboard box with paper and write "Crime Clue Box" on the front, sides, and top. Cut a slit in the top. Place the box in your school office, media center, or classroom.
2. On or near the Crime Clue Box, post a sign about how the box should be used. Your sign might say something like this:

The Crime Clue Box is for reporting crimes or other suspicious activities that you witness personally. Your clue will be taken seriously. Please do not misuse the Crime Clue Box.
3. Make copies of the Crime Clue Report form on page 239 and place them beside the Crime Clue Box.
4. Notify your local law enforcement agency or crime prevention council about your Crime Clue Box. They can collect the clues on a regular basis and follow up on the information.
5. If police or private citizens want to offer rewards for clues that lead to arrests, you might post a sign suggesting that witnesses write their birth dates (and/or other identifying number) in the upper right corner of the Crime Clue Report. This can be used to identify the witness who earns a reward.

Variation: Start a Crime Clue Box at your community library, post office, clubhouse, local park building, or community center.

MEASURE OFF A DRUG-FREE School Zone. Most states now have laws requiring stiffer penalties for people who are caught using or selling drugs within 1,000

feet of a school. Find a tape measure and measure off 1,000 feet in all directions of your school. Contact your local police department or city offices and ask for support in placing warning signs to announce the Drug-Free School Zone.

SURVEY YOUR SCHOOL inside and out to look for unsafe conditions. You might do this with your class or make it a schoolwide activity, with each class or homeroom conducting its own survey. Take detailed notes about anything you have questions about; photograph any safety problems you see. Compile the results and present them to your principal. Give your principal time to review your findings, then ask him or her to let you know what repairs and safety improvements will be made. Find out how you can help. Repeat your survey at the end of the school year. Monitor what's been done and what still needs doing.

RESEARCH DRIVING SPEEDS and fatalities in several countries (including the United States, Western and Eastern European countries, Canada, and Mexico). Is there a connection between speed and the numbers of accidents and/or fatalities? Make a graph to show your results.

CALCULATE THE COSTS OF DRUNK DRIVING. According to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, accidents caused by drunk drivers cost every man, woman, and child in the United States over \$400 each year. How much money might be saved in your town or city if drunk driving accidents could be cut by 25 percent? by 50 percent? by 75 percent? If they could be eliminated altogether? (TIP: Start by finding out the population of your town or city, then do the math.)

Variation: Start a chapter of SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) at your school.⁸

START A DRUNK DRIVING WATCH program in your community. Anyone who notices a suspicious car (one that is weaving, moving erratically, cutting corners or going too wide around corners, straddling lane markers, coming too close to other cars, driving without headlights at night, etc.) contacts the police

⁷ This activity and the "Crime Clue Report" form on page 239 are adapted from *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects* by Barbara A. Lewis (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1995), pages 26–28. Used with permission of the publisher.

⁸ See page 49 for information on how to contact SADD.

Crime Clue Report

See "Start a Crime Clue Box" on page 238.

Today's Date: _____

WHAT happened? _____

WHO did it? _____

Male or female? (Circle one) M F Age? (Approximate) _____

Hair color and style: _____

Eye color: _____ Race or ethnic group: _____

Describe any scars or marks: _____

What language was the person speaking? _____

Describe the person's clothing, hat, shoes, glasses, etc.: _____

WHERE did it happen? (If you don't know the address, describe houses, stores, and landmarks nearby): _____

WHEN did it happen? _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

If there was a car involved, give as much information as you can:

Color: _____ Make: _____

Year: _____ License plate #: _____

Dents or marks: _____

If the crime involved stolen goods, what was stolen? _____

Do you know where the stolen goods are? _____

Is there anything else you remember? _____

immediately to report it. Be sure to include this information when you make your report:

- ☞ where you saw the suspicious car
- ☞ the direction the car was going
- ☞ the type and color of car
- ☞ the license plate number (if you could see it)
- ☞ what the car was doing (weaving, swerving, etc.).

START A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH program in your community. Find out how by contacting your local police department or city offices. Some communities have special “Neighborhood Watch Program” signs that neighborhoods can post. These signs let strangers know that a neighborhood is organized and alert to suspicious activities and persons.

CHECK IT OUT



National Association of Town Watch

PO Box 303

Wynnewood, PA 19096

1-800-648-3688

www.natw.org

Call, write, or go online for help starting a neighborhood watch program.

National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC)

2614 Chapel Lake Drive, Suite B

Gambrills, MD 21054

(443) 292-4565

www.ncpc.org

Call or write to request a copy of the “Neighborhood Watch Organizer’s Guide” or go online to read it. NCPC is also the home of McGruff the Crime Dog. Visit this page on the Web site for activities, games, and tips from McGruff: www.mcgruff.org

SURVEY YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD to learn which neighbors don’t have smoke alarms in their homes and/or deadbolts on their doors. Work with local police to find a sponsor to supply smoke alarms and deadbolts, or fundraise so you can purchase some and donate them to neighbors in need.

PLAN A NEIGHBORHOOD CLEANUP DAY. Create and distribute a flyer announcing the time and date and inviting your neighbors to participate. With your family, survey your neighborhood and identify unsafe streets or sidewalks, unlighted alleys,

abandoned lots or houses, or anything else that needs attention. Collect trash from streets, sidewalks, and parks. Contact your city council member and report the safety problems you found.

Variation: Plan a cleanup day at your home or school.

ASK YOUR MAYOR TO PROCLAIM a Safety Week for your town or city. Work with your city offices to choose safety activities and assign them to various companies, businesses, and service organizations. Contact your local TV and radio stations and ask them to advertise Safety Week.

START A SAFE ESCORT or walking service. Older kids might walk younger kids home from school. Or volunteers might escort elderly people to stores or other places.

START A HOTLINE (RED) or a warmline (yellow) for kids who need help to call. Find out if you can do this at your school or community center, or contact other community organizations that might be willing to donate desk space and one or more phone lines. Recruit volunteers and trainers. Gather names and numbers of people and organizations willing to serve as resources for referrals.

☞ *Hotline resources:* psychologists, doctors, police, suicide prevention experts, teen pregnancy experts, substance abuse experts, counselors, etc.

☞ *Warmline resources:* counselors, teachers, parents, and others available for tutoring and giving advice on friendship troubles, dating, getting along with family members, etc.

VOLUNTEER TO WORK WITH LATCHKEY KIDS in an after-school program that keeps them safe and off the streets.⁹ You might teach a skill, play games, or read stories.

MAKE A STREET SMART SAFETY TIPS poster or mobile. Share it with your class, club, or siblings; younger kids (at your school or in latchkey programs); youth groups (Scouts, 4-H, Campfire); and anyone else who’s interested. Here are some tips you might include:

⁹ See “Caring,” pages 26–27, for a story about Claudia Rodriguez, who started an after-school program for kids.

- ✓ Watch where you're going. Look and listen.
- ✓ Walk solidly and show that you're confident and assertive.
- ✓ Keep your head up and your eyes forward; don't stare at the ground.
- ✓ Don't walk or jog after dark. If you must, use busy, well-lighted sidewalks.
- ✓ Know what goes on in your neighborhood. Avoid dangerous spots.
- ✓ Don't carry large amounts of money or "show your dough." (But always carry enough coins to make a phone call.)
- ✓ Go with a buddy. Don't walk, jog, or ride subways alone.
- ✓ If you're taking a public bus or subway, make sure you know the route and your stop.
- ✓ Always let someone (your parents, brother, sister, a friend) know where you're going.
- ✓ If a stranger in a car tries to lure you over, ignore him or her. Go into the nearest store or walk toward a group of people.
- ✓ NEVER hitchhike.
- ✓ Follow your gut feelings. If you feel nervous about a place or a group of people, avoid them.
- ✓ If you drive a car, park in well-lighted areas.
- ✓ If someone follows or harasses you, don't worry about looking cool. Scream, yell, shout "STAY AWAY!" and run. Knock on someone's door or go into a store or business.

Variation: Make a safety coloring book for younger kids. Write a safety tip and draw a cartoon on each page. Contact your local safety council to see if there's a way to make multiple copies of your coloring book and distribute them to schools and clubs.

LEARN HOW TO STAY "STREET SMART" on the Web. The most basic, widely available, and easy-to-understand rules for online safety were written by Larry Magid, a syndicated columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. You can read them at: www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm

For a free printed copy of Larry Magid's complete brochure, "Child Safety on the Information Highway," call 1-800-843-5678.

LEARN HOW TO PREPARE YOUR HOME and family for any kind of disaster—from fires to earthquakes, floods to hurricanes. Contact your local Red Cross chapter and request copies of disaster education materials including "Your Family Disaster Plan" and "Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit." Study them with your family. Assign specific emergency preparedness chores to individual family members. Practice fire drills, tornado drills, and other drills so everyone will know exactly what to do and when if disaster should ever strike.

CHECK IT OUT

American Red Cross

www.redcross.org

Visit the Red Cross Web site and click on Plan & Prepare for disaster preparation tips. Learn how to prepare a disaster supplies kit.

MAKE A PIE CHART TO SHOW where violent crimes against teens most often occur. Use these statistics from the National Crime Prevention Council:

- ▼ on the street, park, or playground: 36%
- ▼ at school: 24%
- ▼ at home: 14%
- ▼ in the office, at jobs: 6%
- ▼ in parking lots: 9%
- ▼ other/unknown: 11%

START OR JOIN A CRIMEFIGHTING PROGRAM for youth. Check with local law enforcement agencies and city agencies to see if any such programs are already in place in your area. If not, find out how you can start one, and seek support from city officials. Or join a national organization.

CHECK IT OUT

Celebrate Safe Communities (CSC)

National Crime Prevention Council
2614 Chapel Lake Drive, Suite B
Gambrills, MD 21054
(443) 292-4565

www.ncpc.org/programs

Created by the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) and Street Law, CSC gets people involved in crime prevention to make themselves safer and their communities stronger.

CHOOSE A SPORT YOU ENJOY and make a list of safety tips for that sport. Share your ideas with a coach or faculty sponsor. If you notice unsafe conditions at games or practices, report them.

PLAY A "WHAT IF . . ." GAME. Brainstorm several unsafe situations and write them on index cards. *Examples:*






- ? What if you have to stay late after school, and when you leave to walk home it's already getting dark?
- ? What if you witness a bicycle accident?
- ? What if you notice that your garage is full of paint cans, paint thinner, and old rags?
- ? What if you visit a friend and notice a gun lying on a table?
- ? What if you're hiking and you fall and twist your ankle?
- ? What if you notice a stranger following you in a car?
- ? What if you're home alone and a stranger comes to the door?

Divide into two teams (Team A and Team B). Pick a card and read the "What if . . .?" question aloud to Team A. They have one minute to think of a safety plan. If they do, they earn *one* point. If they don't, the question passes to Team B. If Team B comes up with a safety plan, they earn *two* points. Ask Team A the first three "What if . . .?" questions, Team B the next three, and so on for as long as people want to play (up to 12 questions). The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

CHECK IT OUT

What Would You Do? A Kid's Guide to Tricky and Sticky Situations by Linda Schwartz (Santa Barbara, CA: The Learning Works, 1990). This common-sense guide prepares kids to handle more than 70 unexpected, puzzling, and frightening situations at home, at school, or out on their own. Ages 8–12.

READ STORIES ABOUT SAFETY. Look for these books:

-  *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Warner (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1992). Four orphans who have run away from the grandfather they have never met make their home in an abandoned boxcar. Ages 8–10.
-  *Call It Courage* by Armstrong Sperry (New York: MacMillan, 1940). Tired of being called a coward, a young Polynesian boy who is terrified of water sets out on a journey in a canoe in the South Pacific.
-  *Driver's Ed* by Caroline Cooney (New York: Dell, 1996). Three teenagers' lives are changed forever when they steal a stop sign from a dangerous intersection and a young mother is killed in an auto accident there. Ages 12 & up.
-  *Someone Is Hiding on Alcatraz Island* by Eve Bunting (Boston, MA: Berkley Publishing Group, 1986). When he gets in trouble with a gang at his San Francisco school, Danny flees to Alcatraz island, but the gang traps him and a Park Service employee in an old cell block. Ages 10–14.
-  *Trapped* by Roderic Jeffries (New York: HarperCollins, 1972). When Gerry and Bert are caught in a snowstorm during a hunting trip, the two boys must overcome their dislike for each other in order to survive.

Character in *ACTION*

Kempsville Middle School: The "Lifesavers"

The soccer team from Kempsville Middle School in Virginia Beach, Virginia, was in the middle of a game when they noticed something unusual. The members of the other team were wearing a patch on their sleeves. When the Kempsville kids asked about it, they learned that the patch was in memory of a teammate who had died in a bicycle accident. He was hit by a car—and he wasn't wearing a helmet.

Back at school, seventh grader Chris Bagley charged into his classroom and told his teacher, Carolyn Stamm, and his classmates about it. "That hits home," said Chris's friend, T. Jack Bagby. "He was the same age as us, and he played soccer. That could happen to us, too."

Emily Mead spoke up. "It makes me mad, because a lot of kids get hurt or killed in bike accidents, and it wouldn't happen if they had been wearing helmets."

On the spot, Ms. Stamm's class decided to take on the problem as a project. They dubbed themselves the "Lifesavers" and started doing research.

They read books and newspapers and interviewed people in person and by telephone. The Kempsville kids learned that some 400,000 children in the United States are injured each year in bicycle-related accidents, about 300 are killed, and only five percent of all school-age bikers wear helmets.

With their research done, it was time to take action. The students phoned their city council and asked if they would pass a city ordinance requiring kids to wear bicycle helmets. The council said they'd have to get the idea approved by the state first. The kids called a state delegate and asked if he would help. The delegate said he'd have to be sure that the city council was in favor of it. What a runaround!

But the Kempsville middle schoolers weren't discouraged. They hunched over their desks, writing a flurry of letters to council members, other delegates to the state assembly, even the editor of the *Virginia Pilot*. Emily Mead's letter was printed in the newspaper, and that got the ball rolling. In her letter, Emily wrote: "More kids are killed and



The Kempsville Middle School "Lifesavers" at the International Future Problem Solving Conference in Providence, Rhode Island

injured each year on bicycles than on skateboards, roller skates, Big Wheels, and scooters combined. Ninety percent of the injuries are from collisions with cars. Eighty percent of fatal bicycle injuries and seventy-five percent of disabling injuries could have been prevented if the child had been wearing a bicycle helmet."

Meanwhile, the kids worked with the local police to write a grant for 500 bicycle helmets. They figured that they could save a few heads by passing out free helmets. The police helped them to sponsor a bike race, the "Champion Challenge," where they distributed the helmets and conducted bicycle safety inspections. To publicize the race, the Kempsville students visited several schools and put on homemade skits.

Hundreds of kids came to the race, and it was a huge success. At the race, student Lara McBride

told a newspaper reporter that "Bicycles are more dangerous than motorcycles, because with motorcycles you can at least hear the engine, but with a bicycle you can't hear anything unless you have a bell or something."

After the race, the kids lobbied the city council, which passed a resolution in favor of the helmet ordinance. That satisfied the state governor, who in turn passed a law saying that other localities in Virginia could also institute bicycle safety ordinances. With everyone finally in agreement, the Kempsville kids got their ordinance, which requires bicyclists ages 14 years and under to wear protective helmets within the Virginia Beach city limits. The ordinance took effect on July 1, 1995.

"I'm proud of our work," Christie Padgett says. "Now adults know that we can make a difference in our community."

Wisdom

**Intelligence, learning, knowledge, understanding,
intuition, common sense, being a lifelong learner**

“Dare to be wise!”
Friedrich von Schiller

Once, over a two-year period, I rode more 4,000 miles on a stationery bike. I know I traveled that far because there was an odometer attached to the handlebars. On the one hand, my body and mind benefited from the exercise. On the other, I had ridden a distance equivalent to the width of the United States . . . and had gone nowhere and learned nothing.

Wisdom goes beyond the distance you travel in life or the facts you accumulate along the way. It's possible to visit every country in the world and have an encyclopedia in your head and still not be wise. To be wise means to gather all of your experiences—everything you've done, seen, and heard, everywhere you've gone, everyone you've known—and build positive meaning from them to apply to your everyday life.

Wisdom is the responsible use of knowledge and experience. It's a journey, not a destination. If you're wise, you keep learning all your life. Wisdom is a beginning, not an end. If you're wise, your door is always open to new knowledge, new experiences, new roads to travel. Wisdom has no boundaries or fences. If you're wise, you're not afraid of new ideas, because you know that you can always decide to accept or reject them.

The Wright Brothers were determined to fly—in spite of the teasing, harassment, and skepticism

they encountered along the way. People often told them “If God wanted people to fly, he would have given them wings.” It may be hard for you to believe that people once thought this way, especially if you've ever ridden on an airplane. But if you watch the news and listen, you'll hear people saying similar things about the inventors, experimenters, and dreamers of today. Some people are afraid of the unknown; they aren't sure where great leaps in knowledge will lead. But knowledge should never be feared, because knowledge itself is seldom bad. It's the way people use (or misuse) knowledge that can sometimes be harmful. Having sound judgment is another part of being wise.

Many people throughout history have been called “wise” or credited with having wisdom—people like Albert Schweitzer, Mohandas Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Helen Keller, Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, the Dalai Lama, and others. Even some fictional characters are considered wise—like Lisa Simpson of *The Simpsons*. Being wise should *not* be confused with being a wisecracker, wiseacre, wisenheimer, or wise guy (Bart Simpson would head that list).

What might it mean to *you* to be wise? Your definition might be different from someone else's definition. You might want to ask various people you know—your parents, teachers, religious leaders, friends, and other people you trust and respect—what wisdom means to them.

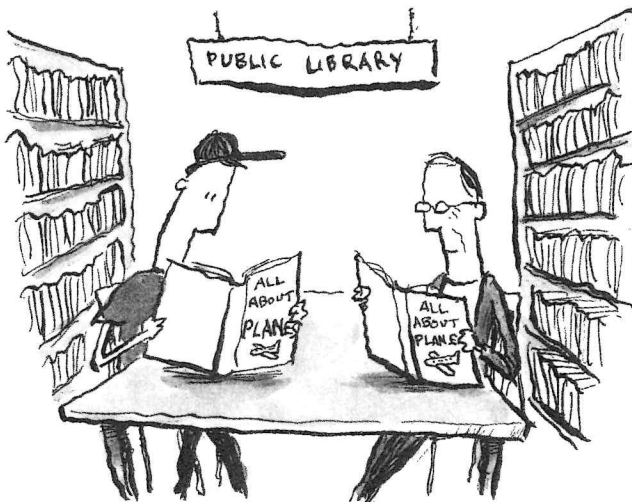
16 Ways to Become Wise

1. Learn from experience. This includes positive and negative experiences. Let suffering and mistakes become your teachers; remember that mistakes teach you about things that *don't* work so you can discover what *does* work. Allow suffering to teach you patience, compassion, caring, and sharing with others. Reflect on the things that happen to you and the things you do. Accept responsibility for the choices you make—and the consequences.

"Wisdom is not to be obtained from textbooks, but must be coined out of human experience in the flame of life."

Morris Raphael Cohen

2. Develop your mind. Learning doesn't end at 17 (or 18, or 21, or whatever age you stop going to school). Wise people are lifelong learners. Keep an open mind to new information and stay "teachable." Seek knowledge, ideas, cultures, and "to go boldly where no one has gone before" (to quote Captain Jean-Luc Picard of "Star Trek: The Next Generation"). Your mind has enormous power and potential; never be afraid to strengthen and stretch it even more.



"The excitement of learning separates youth from old age. As long as you're learning you're not old."

Rosalyn S. Yalow

3. Care for your body. You know that it's important to stay healthy. Eat well, get enough sleep and exercise, keep your body clean, and avoid harmful habits like smoking and drinking alcohol.

4. Care for your spirit. Your inner self needs TLC, too. Feed your spirit (or "mind," or "soul," or whatever you prefer to call it) with meditation or prayer. Exercise it with service to others; rest it with quiet contemplation . . . and time spent watching the clouds go by.

5. Know yourself and what you can become. Follow your interests and passions; explore and develop your talents. Knowing yourself also means acknowledging and accepting your limitations. If you don't enjoy hockey and you're not very good at it, you don't need to feel guilty about not trying out for the hockey team. On the other hand, if you *love* hockey and you're not very good at it, you know what to do: Learn. Get help. And practice, practice, practice.

"The most excellent and divine counsel . . . is to study and learn how to know ourselves.

This is the foundation of wisdom and the highway to whatever is good."

Pierre Charron

6. Have confidence in your worth. Don't rely on others for approval and acceptance; your power comes from within. Don't count on others to get you going; be a self-starter.

7. Seek and build relationships with others. How you relate to others depends on how you relate to yourself. When you accept and appreciate yourself, it's easier to accept and appreciate others. Get to know other people and grow close to them—at home, at school, in your neighborhood and community. Be willing to learn from them. You may discover that people in your everyday life—your parents, grandparents, next-door neighbor, teachers, favorite aunt or uncle, best friend, youth group leader—are full of wisdom.

8. Seek and build relationships with the world.

All of nature produces music together, like the members of an orchestra. Wise people are those who flow with nature's melody—with the forces of weather, animals, and the world's creatures. Learn to share, balance, and walk *with* nature. This means that you don't go out and wantonly shoot birds with your new BB gun. You respect the animals and other living things around you.

9. Develop your intuition. When you're intuitive, you're able to feel or sense the feelings, beliefs, wants, and needs of others. Not everyone is naturally intuitive, but you can work to become more intuitive. One way to do this is by trying to imagine how other people feel. Put yourself in their place; walk in their moccasins.

10. Use your common sense. Often, common sense is simply a matter of thinking before you act—of drawing on what you already know without having to figure it out. Common sense is a kind of "folk wisdom." It's not sophisticated; it's not profound. Common sense tells you not to walk into the street in front of a moving car. It tells you to close the window when it's raining. It tells you that if you don't like being called names or bullied, other people don't like it either.

11. Make plans and decisions based on fairness and truth. Be tolerant of other people and ideas. Try not to judge them. Gather as much information as you can before forming an opinion.

12. Try to see the "big picture." When you can imagine what a puzzle might look like when it's put together, it's easier to see where individual pieces fit. *Example:* You understand that *all* people have a need to feel loved and accepted. You can't reach out to everyone in the world, but you can reach out to the individuals around you—people of all ages, races, religions, cultures, sizes, shapes, and so on. Seeing the "big picture" also means that you're better prepared for surprises and possible setbacks. You can see the tornado before the funnel cloud appears.

"The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision."

Helen Keller

13. Be flexible and adaptable. When your grandfather was young, he probably started a job or career that he stayed with for his entire working life. You might need to make three or four career changes over your lifetime. Today and increasingly in the future, the people who succeed are those who change, learn, and grow. Be open to new ideas.

"In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future."

Eric Hoffer

14. Be willing to delay your wants. You need to wait until you're old enough for certain things you want to have and do—buy a car, stay out past curfew, get your own apartment, and so on. Kids who can't wait to get what they want might steal, quit school, or run away. Adults who can't delay their wants might buy a home that's more than they can afford. If you're willing to work hard, build the skills you need, and wait for the right time, you can earn the good things you want, and that's part of wisdom.

15. Dare to take risks or look foolish. To become wise, you need the courage to look at things from different angles and challenge accepted ideas and usual ways of doing things. At times, people might make fun of you. Christopher Columbus looked silly to the rest of Europe when he challenged the idea that he'd drop off the edge of the earth if he sailed straight west.

"Without risks, there is no chance of reward."

Richard Bangs

16. Give and take. Wise people know to accept help from others—and to reach down and take another person's hand as they climb life's ladder.

"Knowledge alone is not enough. It must be leavened with magnanimity before it becomes wisdom."

Adlai Stevenson

You've probably noticed that this list includes many of the character traits discussed in earlier chapters of this book. You might want to create your own list of traits, qualities, and characteristics you believe are important to becoming wise. Carry your list with you and refer to it from time to time. Make changes and additions as you grow in wisdom.

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

1 You're 16 years old and you really want to buy a car. Currently you're depending on your family and the bus for rides. You're already working three nights a week after school and every Saturday, and you're thinking about working even more hours—every night after school and Sundays, too. It would be hard to find time to do homework, and you'd have to drop your extracurricular activities, but you'd be able to buy your car a lot sooner. What would be the wise thing to do? Justify your answer.

2 You're a parent whose 14-year-old son has been acting strangely lately. He's skipping classes, not doing his homework, coming home late at night, and spending all of his time at home in his room with the door closed. He's also moody and short-tempered. The whole family is worried about him. What would be the wise thing to do?

3 Your best friend's father was injured on the job and can't work until he recovers. Your friend was planning to start college this fall, but her parents want her to work full-time to help the family until her father returns to work. Now your friend is asking for your advice. Should she go to college (she's on full scholarship) or delay starting until her father can work? She's worried about losing her scholarship . . . but she wants to help her family, too. What's the wisest advice you could give your friend?

4 You think that your parents are too strict with you. They expect you to come home every day after school and do homework for at least two hours; they only let you watch certain TV shows; and they think your friends are "bad influences" and won't let you go to parties with them. Your friends are starting to ignore you because you're never available to hang out with them. One day they invite you to a party on Friday night. You know that the parents will be at home and there's no chance that anything bad might happen—but you also

know that your parents won't let you go just because. Your friends encourage you to wait until they're asleep and sneak out your bedroom window. There's an excellent chance that your parents will never know. What's the wisest thing you can do? How might you respect your parents' wishes and also develop friendships? How might you get them to agree to be less strict with you?

5 Your big sister picks on you all the time. One day, she scratches your parents' car when she takes it for a drive without their permission. She begs you to tell them that *you* accidentally scratched it with your bike as you rode into the carport. She promises that she'll never pick on you again if you'll cover for her. What are the wisest things you can do to help yourself, your sister, and your parents the most?

Activities

WRITE A SHORT STORY about someone who demonstrates wisdom by delaying gratification—by waiting for the right time to do or get something he or she wants. *Example:* A teenager wants a new CD player but decides to save his money for college instead.

WRITE A POEM OR LIMERICK about age vs. wisdom. Are older people necessarily wiser than younger people? What does wisdom mean? You decide.

DEBATE WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT—knowledge or wisdom. Which comes first? Can you have one without the other? Are there times when one should take precedence over the other? When? How? Why?

EXPLORE ALBERT EINSTEIN'S BRAIN. During the 1980s, Berkeley professor and brain researcher Marian Diamond acquired portions of Einstein's brain and studied them closely. She discovered that Einstein's brain had more glial cells per neuron than the average human brain. (Glial cells "glue" your brain together in synaptic connections; the more synaptic connections you have, the better.) Einstein was not only a mathematical genius, he was also a very wise man. Learn more about his brain and the scientist who studied it. Share your findings with your class, club, or family.

CHECK IT OUT

The Human Brain Coloring Book by Marian C. Diamond (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1985). A fun way to learn about the brain, written by the California scientist who studied Einstein's brain.

EXPLORE EINSTEIN'S THEORY of time dilation. Stated simply, this theory proposes that the faster you travel, the slower time goes. Do you believe it? What might this theory mean to space travel? To colonizing other planets? Write your own version of this theory, using an example. Be sure to draw on your wisdom as well as your knowledge.

MAKE A DRAWING, PAINTING, OR sculpture of Athena, the goddess of wisdom from Greek mythology. What did the Greeks believe about her? What was her role in Greek legend? You might research other examples of art (paintings, sculptures, mosaics, etc.) that feature Athena.

CREATE A CHART SHOWING SYMBOLS of wisdom used by various cultures around the world.¹ *Examples:* ant, crane, elephant, hedgehog, lotus, owl, pearl, scepter, tree. Include brief explanations of why each was believed to symbolize wisdom.

RESEARCH THE LIFE OF A WISE PERSON from the past. Try to discover if he or she lived by any particular "rules of wisdom." Find examples of wise things the person did or said. Share your findings on a chart or poster. You might title it "The Wisdom of. . ." You might research one of the following people (or choose someone else who interests you):

- ✧ Jane Addams
- ✧ Susan B. Anthony
- ✧ Saint Augustine
- ✧ Marcus Aurelius
- ✧ Pearl S. Buck
- ✧ Buddha
- ✧ Confucius
- ✧ Albert Einstein
- ✧ Ralph Waldo Emerson
- ✧ Epictetus

- ✧ Anne Frank
- ✧ Benjamin Franklin
- ✧ Mohandas Gandhi
- ✧ Thomas Jefferson
- ✧ Jesus
- ✧ Learned Hand
- ✧ Thomas Hobbes
- ✧ Immanuel Kant
- ✧ Helen Keller
- ✧ Martin Luther King Jr.
- ✧ Lao Tzu
- ✧ Abraham Lincoln
- ✧ Anne Morrow Lindbergh
- ✧ Nelson Mandela
- ✧ Abraham Maslow
- ✧ Moses
- ✧ Satchel Paige
- ✧ Plato
- ✧ Eleanor Roosevelt
- ✧ Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- ✧ Albert Schweitzer
- ✧ Chief Seattle
- ✧ King Solomon
- ✧ Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- ✧ Mother Teresa
- ✧ Mark Twain
- ✧ Voltaire
- ✧ Malcolm X

Variation: Research the life of a wise person from the present. This can be anyone you admire or respect; it doesn't have to be a famous person.

LEARN HOW WISE PEOPLE have been treated throughout history. Have different countries and cultures traditionally revered wise people . . . or feared them? Can you see any relationship between how successful countries and cultures are and how much they respect wisdom and knowledge? You might look at ancient Egypt, classical Greece, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Nazi Germany, etc.

¹ See "Positive Attitudes," page 18, for a resource on symbols and symbolism.

INTERVIEW A NATIVE AMERICAN to learn how members of his or her tribe pass on their knowledge and wisdom to younger generations. Or interview someone from another culture.

INTERVIEW ELDERS IN YOUR OWN FAMILY. Sit down and talk with your grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. Or, if you live too far away to do this in person, write letters. Ask them to share their wisdom with you. What advice would they like to give you? What's the most important life lesson they have learned?

HAVE A FAMILY PLANNING SESSION. Sit down together and brainstorm goals for your family's future—next week, next month, next year, next five years, and so on.² Share and respect each other's wisdom. Decide together on five or ten goals you'd like to actively pursue. You might also ask your family to help you plan your personal goals.

COLLECT WORDS OF WISDOM. Search books of quotations, books by writers you admire, and so on for quotations that inspire you with their wisdom. Make posters, collages, or clay tablets inscribed with your words of wisdom. Hang them around your school, club, classroom, or home.

Variation: Illustrate your words of wisdom with colorful cartoons and share them with younger kids.

LOOK FOR THE WISDOM IN POPULAR SONGS of the past. **TIP:** You might research folk songs, spirituals, patriotic songs, protest songs, etc.

Variation: Look for the wisdom in popular songs of the present. Is there a songwriter or group that you feel is especially wise? Give reasons why you feel that way.

PLAY A "WHO'S THE WISER?" GAME. Divide your class or club into two teams and three judges. A judge reads one of the dilemmas presented below. (Or your group can create its own original dilemmas.) Each team has two minutes to come up with a wise solution to the dilemma—or, if a solution isn't possible, at least a way to make things better. The teams present their solutions/ideas to the three judges, and they have two minutes to decide which solution/idea was the wiser. The team with the wiser solution/idea gets two points. If the judges can't agree, or if the solutions/ideas really


do seem equal, then both teams get two points. Play for 10–15 minutes or as long as people are interested in playing. **IMPORTANT:** Keep the game light. Avoid arguments. If necessary, stop the game to debrief and discuss.


1. You're the parent of two children who both want to take piano lessons. Your children are very competitive and jealous of each other.
2. You sense that your mother is deeply troubled about something, but when you ask "What's wrong?" she says "Nothing."
3. A group of kids in your neighborhood are pestering you to hang out with them. You don't trust them, you're even a little afraid of them, and you certainly don't want to hang out with them.
4. You're a bus driver on a city route. Two of your passengers start arguing with each other, and suddenly one pulls a knife.
5. You're the only doctor present in a hospital emergency room when two patients come in at the same time. One is a small child with head injuries from a bicycle accident; another is a doctor who's bleeding from injuries sustained in an automobile accident. Both require your immediate attention.
6. You have a friend who doesn't get along with her family, and she decides to run away from home. She confides in you and asks you not to tell anyone.
7. You deliver newspapers to a senior citizen in your neighborhood, and you often stop to talk with him. One day he tells you that his children—all adults—want him to sell his house and move into an apartment. He wants to make them happy, but he loves his home.
8. You're walking to school one morning when you notice smoke coming out of a window of a house in your neighborhood. You know the people who live there—a family with three small children. The smoke is coming from an upstairs bedroom window.
9. Two of your friends are always fighting with each other. You like them both, but you don't want to be caught in the middle. Now they're saying that you have to choose between them.


² See "Purpose," pages 195–197, for goal-setting steps.

10. You're a government diplomat, and you've just been asked to negotiate peace talks between two nations that have traditionally fought and distrusted each other.


READ STORIES ABOUT WISDOM. Look for these books:


 *The Boy Who Lost His Face* by Louis Sachar (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997). When David helps his schoolmates attack an elderly woman, she puts a curse on him. With the help of new friends and a very nice girl, he learns that popularity isn't everything. Ages 10–13.

 *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993). Given his lifetime assignment at the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas becomes the receiver of memories shared by only one other in his community and discovers the terrible truth about the society in which he lives. Ages 12 & up.

 *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman (New York: Clarion, 1995). A nameless, home-

less girl is taken in by a sharp-tempered midwife, and in spite of obstacles and hardship, she eventually gains the three things she wants most and learns just how wise she really is. Ages 12 & up.

 *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse (New York: Fine Communications, 1994). This book tells the story of Siddhartha, the young Buddha, and his determination to reach nirvana, the ultimate state of enlightenment. Originally published in 1951. Ages 13 & up.

 *Winter Camp* by Kirkpatrick Hill (New York: Margaret McElderry Books, 1993). After the death of both their parents, a brother and sister move in with their neighbor Natasha, an old Athabascan Indian woman who believes that learning to work and live in the woods is as important as reading books and going to school. When winter comes and their skills are put to the test, they realize the wisdom of the "old ways." Ages 10 & up.

Character in *ACTION*

Elisha Williams: Young but Wise

Sixteen-year-old Elisha Williams clung to the tree trunk with shaking knees. He *would not* give up. He *would* climb this 50-foot tree, walk the thin line, and rappel down. "I have this thing about heights," Elisha explains, recalling the experience. "I used to be afraid of diving boards until I practiced and got over it. So I knew I could do this, too."

And he did. But there was another girl in his group who was terrified by the ropes course. Crying loudly, she backed down after climbing halfway up the tree. Elisha walked over to her and said "It's okay. There are some things we're so afraid to do that it might take someone else to help us through it. It doesn't make a difference how far you go, if you just try." She wiped her eyes and smiled at him gratefully.

Elisha believes that without struggle, progress isn't possible. And he knows what he's talking about, because his own life has been a struggle. When he was very young, he "grew up on the road" because his mother was a traveling preacher. It wasn't easy

sleeping in a different bed almost every night. Then, when Elisha was in grade school, he and his mom finally settled in Columbia, Missouri. They had little money, but they refused to accept welfare. Elisha did his part to make sure that they could support themselves. He sold subscription cards for *Boys' Life*, shoveled snow, and did chores for people. When he was old enough to get a job, he bussed dishes at a restaurant and bagged groceries at a store. He shared his earnings with his mother.

Although Elisha's friends were kids who rode bikes, went fishing, and stayed out of trouble, there was violence elsewhere in their neighborhood. One day, Elisha was outside playing with his LEGOs when a man carrying a gun rushed past. He came so close that Elisha could have reached out and touched him. "Another kid got killed when he crossed an alley nearby," Elisha says. "I heard the shot."

Often, street fights happened outside his apartment building, and once a gang member was shot.

The next morning, Elisha found a bullet on the ground. He picked it up and kept it as a reminder.

"I've never tasted a drug or alcohol," he says, "and I've never been in a gang. I've never smoked and never had a moral problem. But I still try to be nice to other people who have. Maybe my example will rub off on them."

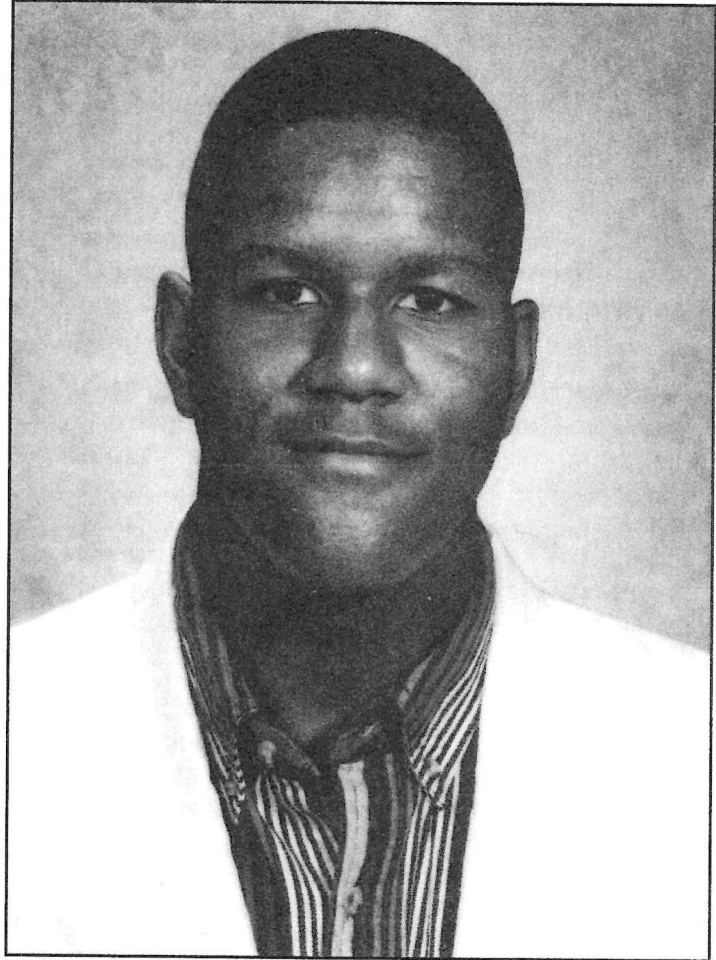
Elisha believes "You should accept yourself for who you are and never make excuses. Reading was hard for me when I was in first grade, so my mother pulled me out of school and taught me herself. I don't try to hide that. Instead, I tell people about it. Now I'm about to graduate from high school with a B average. I've accomplished something, and I want to keep doing my best in everything I can."

His nephew used to poke fun at him for being overweight, so Elisha confronted that problem, too. "I took better care of myself, watched what I ate, and started lifting weights." Today Elisha stands 6'2" tall and weighs 180 pounds. He tries to succeed at everything he does, but he's not afraid of failure. "If you give your best and it doesn't work out, you know that you tried, and you can learn from that."

He spends his free time speaking to young people at churches, and he encourages them to take risks and be themselves. "I tell them they don't have to play basketball to be great," he explains. "They can help other people, serve them, and teach them." He leads by example. He shovels snow for older neighbors in the winter, tutors younger kids, and plants trees for his community. During one summer, he volunteered at a day-care center every day.

"When I need encouragement, I talk to my mom or write in my diary," Elisha says. "I've been

keeping a diary since I was fourteen. I write about how I feel about teen pregnancy, drugs, child abuse—things you see on TV and in the streets. I write about my plans for the next day. I like to be organized." He has a clear sense of what he wants from life and the future. "Happiness doesn't have to be money," he explains. "Struggling through problems, helping others deal with things, serving them, accepting yourself, leading others—that's happiness."



Elisha Williams

1

from brain change to self-change

for you to know

Your brain is an amazing machine. Just by reading this sentence, the building blocks of your brain, called *neurons*, are talking to each other and making thousands of new connections. In this very instant, those neurons are turning each squiggly line on this page into letters, words, and sentences—and then transforming those sentences into thoughts and ideas of your own!

Actually, your neurons have been talking to each other and forming new connections for your entire life. When you were a baby, your neurons built new connections when you took your first steps and every time you said a new word or learned to identify a new object. Over time, as you practiced and built up these skills, these neuron-to-neuron connections helped you walk, talk, and explore the world around you. Since then, they've helped you learn to do much more complicated tasks—making friends, learning to read and write, and gaining new skills like riding a bike and playing a piano.

Some skills (like learning long division) are a lot more complicated than others (like learning to flip on a light switch). Complicated skills involve *many, many* connections between neurons, and they may take more time, effort, and help from others to build. But in both cases, brain science tells us that each of us can always learn new skills, and change in all kinds of ways, through practice and effort—even when it seems impossible. Just like muscles, connections between neurons get stronger the more you use them. That means when you use your brain to complete a task, your brain “remembers” that task—and next time, the task becomes a little bit easier. The time after that, it becomes easier still ... until the task is second nature.

activity 1 * from brain change to self-change

Scientists have a special name for the brain's ability to grow, learn, and change in response to new tasks in our environment: *neuroplasticity* (pronounced *nurr-oh-plas-tiss-itty*). Neuroplasticity comes in handy every time we face a new challenge and need to learn something new—from a different way of solving a math problem to another way of getting along with a classmate. Because our brains have neuroplasticity, each of us has the ability to adapt to the changes and challenges we face.

for you to do

Think about a skill you have, or something you are good at. Try to think of something you are especially proud of. It can be a sport, like swimming or basketball; something creative, like singing, writing, or painting; or something personal, like being a good brother, sister, or friend.

What skill did you choose?

What makes you proudest about having this skill?

Thanks to neuroplasticity, skills like yours can grow and change over time. Skills are often formed from months or years of effort, setbacks, and practice.

What struggles have you faced in building your skill? Try to name at least two.

activity 1 * from brain change to self-change

Why did you decide to keep going—continuing to build your skill in different ways—in the face of these struggles?

How have you (and your brain) learned or grown from these struggles?

Now, think back—*way* back—to when you were a little kid ... the six-year-old version of yourself.

How is your skill today different from your skill when you were six?

activity 1 * from brain change to self-change

more to do

Think about that skill you just wrote about. It might have been hard for your six-year-old self to imagine that your skill would grow into what it is today. In the space opposite, write a letter to the "younger you." In your letter, talk about

- the steps you took and the struggles you faced along the way;
- other people who helped you build your skill;
- why and how you think you managed to build that skill over time.

Remember to be kind to "younger you." You may have felt nervous about what the future holds!

activity 1 * from brain change to self-change

To my six-year-old self,
