



## The Coalition for Youth OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

### “Make the Call, Take the Call”

*There's always a safe way out.*

- Sometimes people find themselves in potentially dangerous situations and just don't know a safe way out. They feel they have to choose between taking the risk or getting in trouble or losing face if they ask for help.
- So if you're in a situation where you need a safe way out -- fast -- who can you call (or text) for a ride home?
- “Make the Call, Take the Call” is all about making an upfront agreement with someone you can count on as a lifeline – someone who agrees to get you home safely, no immediate questions asked. (This doesn't mean no questions asked ever -- just not at that time.)
- The point: when the situation is potentially dangerous, and you'd like to get out of it, it's good to have a lifeline -- someone you know you can call, and who you know will take that call – no questions asked.

\* \* \*

#### **Learn more by reading these helpful pages:**

- How to start the discussion
- Creating a plan
- Sample reactions from local parents and students

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OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

## How to start the discussion

“Make the Call, Take the Call” is an important topic, but that doesn’t mean it’s an easy one to talk about. In fact, the feedback we’ve collected shows that while some kids feel discussing it shows a sense of trust and openness, others feel just the opposite.

So, with that in mind, here are a range of different ways to start the conversation. Of course, they’re just suggestions. It’s best to do what you feel will work best with your family.

### Option 1: **Be direct.**

Mention that you heard about it, and ask your kids what they think. Use the questions at (Send your feedback page) as a guide.

### Option 2: **Be indirect.**

Talk about the idea in terms of other people. For example, here are two real stories -- one about an adult, one about a group of teens -- taken from actual events. Bring up the stories, and ask your kids, and yourself, the questions in italics.

1. A mother, in her forties, is drinking in the morning while she babysits for some neighborhood children. At 9:30 am, she gets a call from school that her own child is sick. She packs all the kids into her van and drives to school to pick up her own child.

*What do you think made her do it? What else could she have done?*

2. A group of friends drives together to another friend’s house. All but one drink and get high, and that one is too young to drive. When it’s time to go home, they all get into the same car, even though the driver has been drinking.

*What do you think made them do it? What else could they have done?*

### Option 3: **Discuss other people’s reactions.**

Print out the “Sample Reactions” section of this document. It lists different responses from students and parents, both positive and negative. Discuss them with your son or daughter, asking which ones -- from both students and parents -- reflect their views. Share your opinions as well.

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OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

## Creating a Plan

“Make the Call, Take the Call” is more than an agreement that it’s okay to call... it’s also a plan of action. Here are some ideas from other sources that might provide some inspiration. But again, the best method is to figure out, through a parent-teen conversation, what would work best for your family.

*NOTE: Many of the ideas below focus on drunk driving, but the same methods can be used to step away from other potentially dangerous situations.*

1. Talk about situations where they might need adult help to get home safely. Remind them that their safety is the most important thing to you. If they call, you’ll pick them up – no immediate questions asked. The discussion about what happened should take place the next day. (Source: Youth Aid Panel)
2. “If your teen is in a predicament where there is drinking taking place and she needs a way to extricate herself, give her a private code between the two of you that she can use when she calls home. She can call you and pretend to have an argument about why she should not come home. That way she can save face with her friends and maybe her life. Say this over and over. It could save some serious heartache.” (Source: <http://www.articlesbase.com/home-and-family-articles/drinking-teens-serious-consequences-for-parents-381314.html>)
3.
  - “Help your children plan fun, “dry” parties at your home or another safe location.
  - Always find out the details of a planned party and confirm those plans with the host family.
  - Never serve alcohol at teenagers’ parties. You may think you’re preventing tragedy by serving alcohol and taking away car keys, but you’re actually breaking the law and undermining the boundaries and values that other parents are trying to maintain.
  - Understand that parties are opportunities for your children to practice social skills, make choices about appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and meet new people. As a safety net, however, always offer them a no-questions-asked-until-later “out” (a ride home, even a pick-up at the end of the block) if they start to feel vulnerable or uncomfortable.”(Source: <http://mvparents.com/displayMailArchive.php?emailid=15>)
4. SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) has a “Contract for Life.” Use this link to check it out: <http://www.sadd.org/contract.htm>
5. “Have a lifeline. Your life depends on it.”  
(Source: The Office of the District Attorney, Montgomery County)
6. Read the attached sample reactions from local teens and parents to learn what other area families are doing.

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OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

## LOCAL TEEN REACTIONS:

### 1. What do you see as the advantages to “Make the Call, Take the Call”?

- Being able to call your parents, no questions asked, lets kids know that they can get home safely without having to worry about being in trouble with their parents.
- Kids are often scared to call their parents because they think they'll be in trouble, but if the parents scare their children away from calling them, they could potentially be staying in a situation that could get them into much more trouble.
- In a risky situation, using the "Make the Call, Take the Call" approach would most likely yield the safest results with respect to one's health, comfort and even punishments with the law or authority figures. It is probably the most responsible technique and encourages honesty and trust between kids and parents.
- The advantages are that the teen gets to get out of a risky situation without making a potentially life-threatening, wrong decision like driving with a drunk kid.
- It lets you make the right decision without the fear of getting in trouble right as they get home.
- This is a great approach and creates an added sense of trust between parents and their kids.
- It's good to have a safe alternative, but I wouldn't call my mom or dad. Maybe a friend's parent instead.

### 2. What do you see as its drawbacks?

- Some parents may blow up at their kids later on, causing them to never want to call again.
- It's possible that some kids won't worry about getting themselves into dangerous settings because they know their parents will pick them up no questions asked. Kids may not learn the seriousness of their poor decisions.
- A drawback to this technique is obviously punishment with parents or even feeling awkward. However, these are both outweighed by the probable consequences of not using this approach.
- The drawbacks I see are that parents will probably still yell, ask questions and punish the child despite the “no questions asked” part of the plan.
- Just because they don't ask questions right then doesn't mean they never will.

### 3. How likely would you be to use this approach?

- I call my parents any time I cannot find a ride or I feel that I am in a bad situation no matter what the time. My parents use this approach in that they won't question me that night, but the next day we will discuss what happened to make sure I was making smart decisions.
- I most likely wouldn't use this approach even though I know that I should.
- I've never been in such an extreme situation that I have needed to make this decision though so I'm not sure how I would react given the circumstances.
- I would be pretty likely to use this approach. I already sort of do use it, but I still have my parents ask questions about where I've been because we're very open with each other.
- I wouldn't use it, because I'd be able to find a safe way home through my group of friends. Some of my friends might because they are the "good" kids, but even they probably wouldn't.
- I know kids that do drink at parties. They wouldn't use this either- there's always a few kids that don't drink and could drive.

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# The Coalition for Youth

OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

- Most kids get “Don’t drink and drive”, so we often have designated drivers.
- 4. How do you feel your parents would react if you brought the idea up to them?**
- Since my parents already use this approach I think it is safe to say they already agree with it and think it is a great idea.
  - They would probably like this idea because they are all about honesty and being open.
  - I think they might agree to it. They will definitely pick me up at any time if I am ever in a risky situation, but they probably wouldn’t be able to keep from asking me questions.
- 5. On the other hand, how would you feel if they brought it up to you?**
- I would feel grateful that my parents are willing to do this for me.
  - I would feel more comfortable going out on the weekends knowing I will never be stuck in a bad situation.
  - On the outside I would probably feel defensive if they brought this up, but essentially I would know it is out of love and care so I would ultimately be appreciative.
  - I would agree to it.
- 6. How would you like the conversation to be handled?**
- The conversation would be brought up best if it were by the parents. This would make kids feel like they parents genuinely mean what they are saying.
  - I would like the conversation to be held with as little judgment and even discussion as possible, but just result in a mutual understanding.
  - I would want them to sit down with me and explain why they think this approach would work. We would go from there and see how things panned out.

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OF LOWER MERION AND NARBERTH

## LOCAL PARENT REACTIONS

### What do you see as the advantages to “Make the Call, Take the Call”?

- It’s a rapid response to a potentially dangerous situation.
- The ‘wait until the next day’ analysis helps parents be a little more moderate in their questioning, and lets the teen think through the situation.
- It’s a good idea. It creates a safety net for the child in a difficult situation.
- Most important, it lets your kid know he or she can trust you as a parent.
- Keeps the focus on safety first, and gives the child a chance to think about whatever uncomfortable behavior is going on.
- The main advantage it gives families is a way to take action and have a plan that they have discussed.
- Frank discussions about the possibility of such events could be effective if seen by the teen as a measure of safety, concern and trust.
- Better to approach as early as possible, akin to drug and sex education.
- It encourages the conversation about 'what ifs' in a proactive way.

### What do you see as its drawbacks?

- Don’t see any so far - my concern rather is will my boys remember to charge their phone or bring it with them.
- Texting to parents could be advantageous in a situation where the teen does not want to be "caught" making the call. But not every household utilizes texting. Also, a late night text message may not be retrieved by parents.
- They might not want to call because they would eventually have some kind of punishment or that they would think that by calling they might get their friends (or other kids) in trouble.
- Having the conversation may inadvertently infer that we think such behavior is likely, we don't trust our teenager. Or conversely may send out mixed message that such behavior is to be expected/the norm.
- Kids feeling like their parents think they "can't handle" difficult situations.
- Kids exposing their vulnerabilities to their parents and/or other adults.
- Kids not wanting their parents to know what's going on.

### How likely would you be to use this approach?

- Very likely. I will definitely try it.
- We have approached the subject but have not delineated a plan.
- We thought it important to designate code words or phrases so parents would recognize it as a "take the call" situation.
- I've already told my kids this message (more or less).
- I have this system in place, but neither of my kids have used it yet. We also have a designated "other" adult who has agreed to get them, no questions asked. They selected this person and have her cell number.

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### **How do you feel your son or daughter would react if you brought it up to them?**

- There might be some discomfort about being “evacuated” out, but I’d try to stress the rather safe than sorry aspect.
- I think they would be very open to this, and that they would also say, “But mom, I haven’t been in that kind of situation.” I would just say “That’s fine, this is an option for the future if a difficult situation ever arises.”
- Our teen is a freshman and would probably be very open to the discussion.
- I just brought it up to my kids. Their reaction was that they wouldn’t need it, but if they did – they wouldn’t call their parents.
- He’d probably say it wasn’t a conversation we needed to have (even though we do) -- because he would say he wouldn’t engage in such behavior.
- I talked about it with my kids. They were fine with it.

### **On the other hand, how would you feel if they brought it up to you?**

- I would be thrilled
- I would feel great if they brought this up to me.
- We would feel compelled to act upon it as a priority.
- I don’t think they would.
- GREAT, if it was in the context of what others might do. Less great if he was admitting that he might need such an out. Either way, we’d be happy he felt comfortable having the conversation.
- Fine, I would be proud of them and tell them that.

### **How would you like the conversation to be handled?**

- I might use the example of a kid whose family we know who recently suffered a bad accident due to driving under the influence – and how making an elegant exit for whatever reason (and we would have to think jointly as to what that would be) might have been a better solution.
- Openly and seriously. You can’t force them to tell you what is going on, but I think this would open the channels for communication.
- We would discuss it as a family, identifying potential situations, defining terms of “no questions asked”, determine code words/phrase, outline alternative contacts if parent isn’t reachable, e.g. close relative, telephone number of local taxi service.
- I talked with my kids, and reinforced that it was their safety that is most important- not the poor choice of risky behavior they might find themselves in and the punishment that might follow. But that I would want them to be safe. They understood that, but still said they would not call because they were confident they could find another solution. I did get them to finally promise that if there was no alternative- that they would call.
- Discuss it with them and reinforce as needed. Explain different possible situations and possible consequences and outcomes.
- Either one on one, or with both parents involved.

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