



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

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### Know! The New Marketplace for Buying and Selling

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon in June, and we were celebrating our eight-year-old son's birthday at our neighborhood park with 20 of his closest friends and a handful of parents. The adults, myself included, were busy watching the children launch water balloons at each other when one of the dads noticed something happening right in the middle of it all.

A young man, about 17-years-old, pulled into the playground parking lot, and two boys, 12 and 13-years-old, approached his car. The dad, who was with our party, recognized the two boys from the neighborhood and began watching closely. He felt like something wasn't right, so he walked up to the car as well. After some resistance and much talk, the truth came out that this older teenager had come to sell these two younger boys a vaping device.

In the end, the driver left with his merchandise in hand, and both the young boys' parents and local police were made aware of the situation. The problem here isn't only the popularity and dangers of vaping among youth, but the ways in which they're getting their hands on it (and other substance-related items).

A talk with the younger boys revealed that they had reached out to the seller through one of many apps that let you buy and sell online.

These apps, like OfferUp and Letgo, certainly have their advantages, even for teens. Young people regularly buy and sell their gently worn jeans, shoes, prom dresses, etc. on these sites, and in return, they get discounted items or some cash in their pockets, along with a valuable business lesson – so long as it is done safely and the items being sold are appropriate.

However, there is a dark side to these apps that parents need to be aware of and young people need to know. The attempted sale of an item prohibited to youth that occurred in our neighborhood is one of them. It's also common for buyers to get scammed and not realize it until it's too late (i.e. paying top dollar for fake designer shoes). But what's even scarier is that there have been many reported cases of teens and adults becoming robbery victims while attempting to exchange money or goods through these apps. There have also been reports of attempted abductions, as people meet up with total strangers. And while many of the apps claim to be committed to safety for their users, it really comes down to the local individuals buying and selling.

In fact, safety concerns have prompted police departments across the country to set up designated safe meet-up spots for doing business through these apps, many of them located in the parking lots of local police stations. The obvious benefit to the police station

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meet-up is that criminals are much less likely to sell fraudulent items or attempt a robbery or kidnapping there. But this also alleviates the temptation for the seller to share personal information, like a home or business addresses.

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Of course, it is up to you to decide if you will allow your child (under your guidance, watchful eye, and, better yet, under your account) to partake in this type of marketplace, as either the buyer or seller. However, even if you choose not to allow it, it is important to educate youth on the topic.

Obviously, buying or selling any substance-related items, including paraphernalia, is an automatic “no” and any attempt should ban them from the privilege of using these types of apps, along with whatever other consequences you decide upon.

**In addition, safety experts recommend that you and your children:**

- Do not share personal information, and be cautious not to reveal an address or other personal info in any photos you may share.
- Do not invite strangers into your home, and do not go to theirs.
- Contact your local police to inquire if a safe meeting site has been designated. If no site has been designated, insist on meeting in a public place, where security cameras are monitoring the area, and there are lots of people around. Never meet in a secluded location.
- Do not go alone to buy or sell an item. Always have a parent or other adult with you. And be sure another family member or adult is aware of your intentions.
- Perform the transaction during daylight hours.
- Always take your cell phone with you.
- Be extra cautious when buying/selling high-value items.
- Trust your instincts; if something doesn't feel right, go with your gut; or if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

It is far too easy for a complete stranger to sell something to our children that we don't want them to have or for our children to become victims of crime. Buying and selling through these various apps can be a great way to make a little cash off unused or unwanted items but it must be done with caution – and that goes for adults as well.

Sources: [News8WTNH: Safety experts warn about the potential dangers of buying and selling through apps. Aug. 2017.](#) [Linda Magill Group: 10 Safe Buying and Selling Tips for Kijiji /Craigslist.](#)