RETURN READY 2021

A guide to holding a brief conversation with the young people in your life about laws and informed decision making in our gradually reemerging world.

#NVRETURNREADY
Opening Talking Points

To begin the conversation with the young people in your life, spend 5 minutes reviewing the ten talking-points in this step. You can start each point with the words ‘Did you know....’ to make it a question, or just read them together with the young person or persons you’re having the conversation with.

Point 1: In courtrooms and with police, ignorance of the law is not an accepted defense for breaking it.

Point 2: When a law is broken by a person and that person is caught, they will have to go to court.

Point 3: That means that even if someone breaks a law on accident, they still have to deal with the consequences.

Point 4: If they accept a deal to take responsibility in exchange for a smaller punishment, or if they are found guilty after a trial, they will be punished for the crime.

Point 5: Even if they did not mean to break the law, they are responsible for their actions.
Point 6: This might not be fair, but it is the world we live in.

Point 7: Remember it like this - The law says what the law says, not what we want it to say.

Point 8: That means instead of complaining about fairness, the best thing to do is be prepared to not break the law on accident.

Point 9: Simply telling young people “Don’t lie, steal, do drugs, destroy things that aren’t yours, or hurt people” just isn’t enough these days to keep them out of legal trouble.

Point 10: That might sound silly, but here are some real things that happen to young people like you that will help to give you an idea of what we’re talking about.
Giving Realistic Examples

Next, spend about 20 minutes going over these very different scenarios that all show ways young people can get into trouble with police and the law, even if they think they’re just having fun.

You can read these together, or get deeper into a discussion by asking the youth you are speaking with if they’ve ever heard of kids being in situations like these.

**Scenario 1:**

There’s a house in the neighborhood that’s been abandoned for years, so one night some of the kids go over and go inside to explore.

Since there’s no one living there so it seems like no big deal, but they can be charged with trespassing and property destruction (if the site has graffiti or damage). They may also be ticketed for being out past curfew.

**Scenario 2:**

Some kids see their friends across the street. Since there are no cars around, they just cross the street to meet them. Even though no one is getting hurt, the kids could get ticketed if there was a crosswalk or traffic light nearby.

It may not seem like that big of a deal to some young people, but tickets cost a lot of money!
Scenario 3:
Fireworks are not supposed to be used by kids without an adult around, but some students still manage to get their hands on them. To avoid getting in trouble, they might go out into a desert away from their homes to set those fireworks off. By trying to not get in trouble with their parents, they’re actually putting themselves in more danger:
Fireworks can easily cause wildfires and if young people are found responsible, they might not be charged with arson but there are many other crimes they may be charged with and fines they could have to pay. Since they probably won’t have the money to pay the fines, that young person’s parents or guardians would be responsible for paying them.

Scenario 4:
Sometimes TV shows & movies have scenes where kids go to houses and throw toilet paper all over them as a prank. The kids pulling the prank use a ton of rolls. They throw them on the roof of a house, all over the fences if the house has one, and then they cover the trees and bushes with more toilet paper. It seems like a harmless thing kids might do, but if the paper gets wet it will stick to surfaces and damage the plants, trees, and grass. That creates a mess that can cost thousands of dollars to clean up. What sounds like a childhood prank could lead to felony property destruction charges if the kids get caught. The parents or guardians could also be responsible for paying for the damage in a situation like this.
Scenario 5:
A group of students start a band and start putting stickers featuring their band’s name all over town. It’s just innocent fun – it’s not like spray paint or anything, so that’s not like graffiti, right?

Wrong! The kids could still be charged with “Placing graffiti on or otherwise defacing property”

Scenario 6:
A few teenage friends get their hands on some fireworks and decide to set them off in a mailbox.

It seems like just ‘kids getting into trouble’, but destroying mailboxes is a federal crime! Punishments can include 3 years in jail and $250,000 in fines – all for a bit of childhood mischief.
Step 2

**Scenario 7:**

Constructive possession is when people have committed a crime and can be criminally prosecuted for being near things they're not supposed to be near, even if those things don’t belong to them. This actually happens a lot with kids and stolen cars – one kid will ‘steal’ a parent’s or family friend’s car and invite their friends to ride along, then all of the students face car theft charges when they get caught! Drugs, guns, and alcohol also lead to constructive possession charges– if police break up a house party and one kid has drugs or a gun, other kids in the home can be charged with constructive possession!

**Scenario 8:**

Several groups of kids meetup to hang out in a large group at a local mall - like a house party without a house. A security guard notices them hanging out without spending any money, and instructs the students to leave.

The students refuse and are now trespassing, but things only get worse from there.

Eventually fights begin to break out among the kids, and soon many of them will be charged with assault, battery, and engaging in malicious mischief.
Lessons to Remember

Use these final thoughts and statements to empower the young person or persons you are speaking with to make intentional and law-abiding decisions when they're having unstructured and unsupervised time as they begin to re-enter the world, and as things return to normal.

Part 1 – A quick review

Accidental Trouble With The Law Is Avoidable!

Those examples are just a few of the real ways young people get into actual trouble with the law, even though they didn’t know they were committing crimes!

The average person – adult or child - doesn’t want to get in trouble with the law, but they don’t have time to go to law school.

That doesn’t matter though – they are still responsible for following all the laws, even the ones they don’t know!

Thankfully, you can remember two lessons to help keep you out of accidental trouble with the law:
Part 2 – Always Pause Before You Prank

Pause before you prank is a reminder: if you’re about to do something silly or funny that you wouldn’t normally do, just ask yourself “Is this something that could actually get me in legal trouble?”

The fireworks in mailboxes and toilet-paper scenarios are two good examples where “Pause before you prank” can keep a person from making a regrettable mistake that crosses the lines into violations of the law.

Part 3 – Remember to “Think Within The Context of The Law”

Thinking within the context of the law just takes ‘pause before you prank’ a bit farther.

The idea of constructive possession – that you can get in legal trouble just for being near someone who is doing something illegal – that’s the kind of thing where you have to stop and again ask yourself ‘Is being in this situation worth the risk that I could get in legal trouble, even if I don’t know for sure that it’s illegal?”
Wrapping Up

No one is saying you’ll try to do bad or criminal things – it’s just a complicated world, and you’ve spent a lot of time at home.

Children’s actions can lead to parents or guardians getting in trouble too – Not only will those adults be sad if the young people in their care accidentally break the law, but sometimes the they can be arrested or lose all their money because of the mistakes of the young people they care for!

These accidents hurt everyone: The kids that get in trouble, but also the parents, guardians, siblings, and other loved ones.

The day is coming when you’ll be going to and from school regularly, and having more time without adults around when you’re hanging out with friends.

This talk is just to make sure you stay safe, smart, and out of trouble with the law.

Finally, consider ending the conversation with this prompt:

“Ok, so let’s see how prepared we all are.

Let’s work together and think of some other small situations that might cause you to get in trouble with the law that we haven’t covered in this conversation yet”

Congratulations, now you and the youth in your home are a bit more #NVRETURNREADY!
Thank you for taking the time to have this conversation with the young people in your home.

If you would like more resources to discuss the rights and responsibilities the students in your home have under the law, we offer many additional resources that make learning these complex subjects easy, fun, and rewarding.

One of the easiest ways to keep the conversation going with the young people you live with is to visit the CONNECT section of our website.

There, you'll find hundreds of discussion ideas built around law-related news stories.

As has been the case since we opened our doors over fifteen years ago, all of our resources are free for every teacher, school, community organization, and family in Nevada.

If you or the organization you represent can make a donation to Project REAL, your support is needed to sustain the important work we do.

With an average cost of $25 per student served, you can donate to us knowing the exact kind of impact your contribution will have towards improving the safety and prosperity of the people of Nevada.

To learn more, request additional resources, or to make a donation, please visit our website.

http://projecttrealnv.org
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Help Spread The Word

After you’ve had our guided conversation with the young people in your life, post how got them #NVRETURNREADY and encourage other adults to do the same thing with the young Nevadans they know.

Working together, we can all do our part to help make life in Nevada better for everyone.

Help Them Learn More

On Project REAL’s website you can find articles that discuss real events that feature the examples we gave in this guide, & more!

Find those pieces and other related content, and use the questions we include with them to help keep your kids thinking within the law long after they are #NVRETURNREADY

Those articles & more can be found at http://projectrealnv.org/connect/blog

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