



**CHILD PASSENGER  
SAFETY ASSOCIATION  
OF CANADA**



**L'ASSOCIATION POUR  
LA SÉCURITÉ DES ENFANTS  
PASSAGERS DU CANADA**

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## **How to effectively influence people: advice from the online trenches**

I became a CPST because I wanted to save children in motor vehicle crashes and help families get it right. You might be like me, and if you are reading this, chances are you want the same thing! We are passionate and have so much knowledge just waiting to be tapped into, all someone has to do is ask (although, sometimes they don't even have to ask - more on that later).

It's Tuesday evening, the dishes are done, laundry is folded and the tiniest of your children has finally given in to sleep! You have some time to yourself (go you!) and you decide to check out some Facebook groups and offer a little support to the masses.

Our passion and advice can often be misinterpreted as arrogance or being judgemental and no one wants to be schooled by a know-it-all. All too often people feel vulnerable when they expose a lack of knowledge and so we can be more effective internet responders when we offer assistance by remembering that first. Here are some more helpful tips:

1. **Don't be a negative Nancy.** I don't know who Nancy is, but from what I gather, she wasn't any fun to be around. I certainly wouldn't search her out at a party. Be helpful, focus on what people are doing right, even if you think it's just a tiny little speck of right. When we explain the correct way to place a chest clip, it is understood that the previous placement was incorrect, no need to point it out.
2. **Comments are optional.** This is where reading your comment before you hit enter is key. If you just typed so fast the keyboard is smoking, this one is for you. Our passion is what drives us and the field of CPS, we need it. It's awesome, I know you are awesome. Sometimes we have to let our passion out in pieces, don't just pop that lid right off. Think of it like mystery in the dating world. I'm not saying be someone you aren't, we already established that you are awesome the way you are. What I am talking about is that you have choices. We all have triggers and thankfully, they aren't all the same. It's ok to leave a comment or post for someone else to respond to. Our cape is shareable, pass it over to someone. Type, read, edit, enter...lather, rinse, repeat.



3. **Save it.** In this instance, I don't mean screenshot it either. I mean save what you have to say for another comment. Has someone already stepped in and offered support? Has the OP already been told what they need to fix? Awesome, save yours for the next time. Someone that is actively looking for help (or even someone who isn't!) doesn't need to be smacked over the head with their failures. In most cases, it being addressed once will more than suffice, and dogpiling will turn everyone off. No need to make it a public shaming.
4. **Screenshots. Ugh.** Don't do it. I know your chin is laying on the floor after reading that post by Mama X or from seeing that picture she posted, but just pick your chin up and move on. Alert an admin or discuss with someone how to handle it. A screen shot to shame is super uncool. No shame, don't go there. If you want to respond, do that. Responding in a positive and helpful manner is a great step and that or moving on are your only useful or productive choices. Screenshots are great for recipes, design ideas and high scores. Screenshots are not for shaming, blaming or making fun of someone...that makes you not awesome.
5. **Remember that's a person on the other end.** We can teach in different ways and often each parent requires us to reach them in a different manner (online or in person). Some parents are visual learners, some lack confidence, some are over confident, some fear judgement, some want all the details and some want just the basics. Some families are easy and some can be more challenging, but they all have real life feelings, emotions and misinformation. If you cannot remain objective and feel like you may get into the shame game, scroll on my friend, this post is not for you. If you can reach the poster by coming from a place of knowledge and support, type on. Remember that the poster has reached out for help...they want the info (Ah-mazing!) and this is your chance to empower them, one great piece of information at a time..
6. **Tap into your network.** CPSAC and CCSN make it easy to connect with other CPSTs. Link up with someone in your area if you are lucky enough to have someone nearby. If you are more isolated, connect online with other CPSTs. Reach out when you need to, there really is someone for everyone. Play to your strengths and know when it's time to tap out. Not knowing something isn't embarrassing and it doesn't make you look dumb. There are so many moving parts in CPS that we have to lean on each other and be kind to one another as well. Just as we don't want to shame a parent, don't shame each other. Taking things to a private chat can help keep things professional. If you and peer cannot communicate effectively with each other, reach out to a mentor or another unbiased peer to help mediate.
7. **Be the Lighthouse.** Let that super awesome passion light shine! The more compassionate we are in each response the more we gain the trust of those lurkers that are there reading it all but not ready to post yet. Your empathy and knowledge won't go unnoticed, I promise. The people that are afraid to risk reaching out are the people who



need you most. Their walls are mighty, but that light of yours will shine right through the cracks.

- 8. Know your limits.** This is more geared towards saving your own sanity and to keep the lighthouse powered. You can't solve every CPS concern and you alone cannot help every family. It's hard to troubleshoot online and if you aren't up to doing it, don't. Directing a family to someone else is a great alternative to putting yourself in a situation that's uncomfortable (for example, refer a parent of a child with special needs to a technician with that training or to their occupational therapist). Don't guess and don't make guarantees you aren't sure of. Try instead to empower parents to find information, admit when you don't know something (you are human after all) and never speak on behalf of anyone else, especially a manufacturer. I would always rather help a family get the correct answer than take a stab at it and find out I was incorrect later. That only causes us to lose credibility with parents, manufacturers and each other.

You know that saying about catching more flies with honey than vinegar? It's true. Just be kind, speak respectfully and don't be arrogant. If that's all you take from this, great! If the choice is a child riding safer or me proving I know more than a parent, my ego is safest in the back seat.

