

Know! Summertime Increases Risk

It's June – which for most teens means summer break is either close at hand or has already begun! Sure most kids are thrilled, but it's a big relief for many parents as well. We finally get to catch a break from the daily stress of dragging tired teens out of bed, staying on top of them to get their homework done, and making sure they are prepared for all those quizzes and tests. But you never get to catch a break from parenting, because risky behaviors, including first-time alcohol use and drug experimentation hit their peak in the summer months.

During the school year, the “risk-taking danger zone” for youth typically occurs during the after school hours, between 3-5 p.m. Summertime expands that window of risk much further as supervision and structure decreases and freedom and time spent with friends increase. Summer boredom, which can kick in rather quickly, also increases teens' risk of using. According to a past survey conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, young people ages 12 to 17 who are frequently bored are 50 percent likelier than those not often bored to smoke, drink, get drunk, and use illegal drugs.

As a parent, we cannot, nor should we, hover over our child's shoulder 24/7 to make sure they make good choices. **But there are some things we can do:**

Be aware: Know that substance use increases in the summer months.

Discuss the dangers of substance abuse: Children whose parents talk with them regularly about the dangers of drinking, smoking and using other drugs are up to 50% less likely to use in the first place.

Establish summertime rules: This includes summer curfew, rules on friends coming over when adults are away, requiring them to answer your call or text when it comes, etc. In fact, it's a good idea to put the summer-specific rules on paper and post it as a reminder. That way, there's no excuse for confusion.

Monitor their whereabouts: Be sure they give you the **Who, What, Where, When, Why & How** before they head out the door.

- Who are they going to hang out with?
- What will they do?
- Where are they going?
- When are they leaving and when will they be back?
- Why are they wanting it?
- How are they planning to get there and get home?
- Let them know that you understand that plans can change, but if they do, they must run it by you before they go forward with those changes.

You may also consider a Family Agreement Form like the one created by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), called “Talk. They Hear You.”

Text in parentheses has been added to include other drug use as well.

The Agreement states:

*As your **mom/dad/caregiver**, I pledge to do my part in helping to keep you alcohol (and drug) free. I*

promise to talk with you about the dangers and harmful effects of underage drinking (and other drug use). I pledge to create a drug and alcohol-free environment that is fun and safe for you and your friends. I also pledge to pick you up at any time or place if you find yourself in any uncomfortable situation where underage drinking (or other drug use) is involved.

Parent Signature(s) _____

*As your **son/daughter**, I understand that alcohol (and other drugs) can harm my body and my mind and make me say and do things I might regret. I pledge to avoid situations where my friends and peers are drinking underage (or using other drugs), and I promise to call or text you to help remove me from those situations, if they arise.*

By signing this pledge, I agree that I will not engage in underage drinking (or other drug use).

Child Signature _____

Keep in mind that this agreement is two-fold. In addition to your child promising not to do things they might regret, you're agreeing to provide an alcohol and drug-free environment for your child. Take a look around and make sure that medications and alcohol are secured to keep any curious teens – yours or your kids' friends – out of harm's way.

We – as parents – are the first and most important line of defense against substance use for our children. Even through the lazy days of summer, we must stay on top of our "parenting" game to keep our children safe and healthy. It is vitally important to set summertime limits, monitor our children's whereabouts, and keep those important anti-substance use conversations going.