
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, June, 2014

Summer Time

Explore, Improve, Relax and Have Fun

Summer has never been more welcome than this year after the cold, snowy and challenging winter that we all experienced. This is a wonderful time of year that provides many opportunities for all members of the family. The most obvious, of course, is that everyone can spend more time outside and engage in more leisure activities.

Although the weather and summer vacations contribute to a more relaxed lifestyle during this time of year, it is very important that teens have some structure to their summer activities. This may not be an issue for those teens who have jobs, but still many teens are finding the job market difficult. Yet, with a job or not, the summer should provide all teens with the opportunity to explore new interests, acquire a new skill, investigate career options or give back by doing some volunteer work at a local agency or hospital in the community.

An article published on June 10th, 2014 in The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) discussed several things that teens could do to make the most of their summer in this challenging economic environment. Bradford Agry, a New York career coach, suggested that if a teen can't get a job working for someone else, they could use the summer to become an entrepreneur by starting their own business. Agry also advised, "Teens could build a business around mundane tasks such as dog walking, gardening or tutoring children, it's a valuable experience. It's also a good opportunity to test your ability to be creative around self-marketing, and managing their time."

The article also suggested that teens look to friends and family for a possible job. A parent may be willing to pay their teen to take care of siblings or to do chores around the home. A teen might also offer to work for a family friend's business doing database management, social media assistance or scanning. A teen could have an informational interview with the friend and ask them about their career and could even ask the friend if they could "shadow" them in their job for no pay. This allows a teen to "try it on" and determine what they might like to do as a profession but even more importantly, find out what they would not like to do.

The summer can also be a time of self-improvement for a teen. They could "get fit" by being more active and could also investigate ways to make better choices about living a healthier lifestyle. Some ways to do this might be to encourage your teen to explore meditation, take a teen yoga class, engage in regular exercise, take walks, run, and incorporate a regime that includes healthy eating, getting enough sleep, and avoiding too much sugar and caffeine.

Another way teens can improve themselves could be to have more down time to reflect, relax and take 20 minutes a day to write in a journal. The WSJ article made the point that in this time of preoccupation with social media and smart phones, the summer is a good time for teens to spend some time alone and get to know themselves better. A recent book, *Quiet*, by Susan Cain discusses the merits of "solitude" as a time to think and reflect. An op-ed piece by Frank Bruni in the New York Times on June 10th, 2014 discussed the merits of solitude and points out that some of the best ideas and thinking is done during moments when one is alone.

The summer can also provide teens with the opportunity to develop new skills and explore different and new activities. Learning to swim, taking courses or investigating a new interest through a town or village recreation department or at one of the local Westchester colleges can expand the student's interests. Some colleges offer language immersion courses that can be very beneficial to a teen.

In the summer there is more time for parents to help their teen refine and develop their emotional, social and coping skills. As a result, their teen may be better able to deal with the social and academic pressures once they return to school. For instance, helping anxious teens explore ways to deal with stress could help them develop skills that can be used for the rest of their lives.

There are many good reasons to help your teen develop social skills by doing role-playing or taking the time to discuss ways to handle challenging situations. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), in its guide entitled *Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents*, says that positive social skills, effective resistance skills and effective communication skills can all prevent substance abuse. Emotional regulation and impulse control are also very important

The guide also discusses the value of strong connections between children and their

significant others, including parents, peers, teachers and others as a way of preventing drug abuse. These strong relationships are more difficult to make if a child lacks social skills and the ability to build connections. Summer provides the opportunity for teens to practice these skills and develop new relationships with peers at camp, summer jobs, volunteer opportunities or even during visits with extended family members.

Summer can also be a time to have fun and spend time together as a family. A family vacation is wonderful but it can also just be a day at the beach or a picnic. Time can also be spent on family projects such as painting a bedroom, doing yard work or helping with a parent's work. Ultimately, teens love "belonging" and although some may appear to find the family unit somewhat "annoying," most love doing something special with their family. These memories are often what sustain parent-teen relationships when issues become more difficult and challenging. Other Suggestions for the summer

Other Suggestions

Summer is also a good time for teens to "regroup." For teens who have had emotional or behavioral problems but may not have wanted to take time away from school, sports or other activities, this is a good time to meet with a professional and obtain the help needed.

Finally, dispose of or lock up any unused alcohol left over from summer festivities. Lock up all prescription and non-prescription drugs and safely dispose of unused drugs at any of the MedReturn boxes at police stations throughout Westchester County. To find the list, go to www.westchestergov.com.

The Five A's Of Parenting

Mike Nerney, a prevention specialist, makes the following recommendations to parents about strategies they can implement to keep their children safe during the summer:

Aware

Every family should have a strategy in place so that they know where their teen is and who they are with during the day and at night. Be sure to check-in with other parents and make sure that all the teens are in a supervised setting with a responsible adult. Empty houses with no adult supervision have proven to be very dangerous places for teens in Westchester County. It is usually in this unchaperoned setting that many teens first try alcohol and drugs or have their first sexual encounter. Text messaging, talking on the phone, and even asking your teen to take a picture of where they are and sending it to you, have made the job of knowing where your child is much easier.

Alert

Be alert to any behavioral changes in your child during the summer. A red flag should go up if your

teen becomes secretive and begins to exclude you from the details of their lives. This could be a sign of substance use. According to a recent survey, **teens are much more likely to try alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs for the first time during the summer months.** A 2012 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found first-time use of these substances, as well as marijuana and hallucinogens, peaks during June and July compared to other months, with thousands of more youth trying them each day.

For example, on an average day in June or July, more than 11,000 teens aged 12 to 17 tried alcohol for the first time, compared with averages of about 5,000-8,000 first-time users in most other months. December was the only other month with a similar peak in first-time alcohol use.

Awake

When your children gets home, give them a hug or a kiss and talk to them for a few minutes to make sure they are not under the influence of any substance. It may be a deterrent for your children to use alcohol or other drugs if they know that they will have to pass the “hug/kiss/talk” test later on in the evening. If anything in their behavior concerns you, make sure they are safely in bed and wait until the morning to address the issue. Important note: If your teen seems impaired, **DO NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE** “to sleep it off.” Keep them awake and talking. Call 911 immediately if your teen cannot keep their head up or stay awake.

Assertive

Make sure you and your child have discussed appropriate consequences for inappropriate and unhealthy behavior. The consequences should be firm, respectful and related to the behavior. Furthermore, although this can be difficult, the consequences must be enforced.

Affirming

Let your children know that you love them and want them to have a wonderful summer. Help them understand that they are the most precious people in your life and if they feel that you are being too protective, it is because it is your job to keep them safe.

Student Assistance Services

Wishes everyone a happy, safe and relaxing summer.



