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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, June, 2010

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## Summer, 2010



When the storms were raging in March, summer seemed so far away and here it is. I know that we all look forward to summer activities, enjoying the good weather and a more relaxed pace.

However, this time of year does bring its own challenges in terms of teens having more time when they are not in a structured environment and being supervised by a caring and responsible adult. The research shows that summer is the time when many young people experiment with marijuana and alcohol for the first time, so parents and other caretakers should be aware that it is a time to be vigilant about where their children are spending their time and what they are doing during the free time that they have. Planning some constructive activities can go a long way to keeping children safe and secure during this time.

Everyone at SAS joins me in wishing you a relaxed, safe and happy summer so that we can return to our work refreshed and renewed in the fall.

*Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW, CPP*

## Summer Safety

The lack of structure, more leisure time, transitions, and more opportunities to be in unsupervised settings can make the summer a challenging time for students and their parents. A good way to start the summer is to have a discussion with your teen so that everyone is on the same page in terms of expectations, curfews, and values. The research from the Columbia University Center for Addictions and Substance Abuse (CASA) reminds parents that they can have a very positive impact on the life-style decisions that children make. Parents may not feel that their teens are listening to them, but the research shows that they are!

Usually the most successful strategy is for parents and teens to set some rules together so both know what is acceptable and what is not. In addition, parents and teens should agree on what constitutes a dangerous situation and how to handle it. It is also helpful to role-play possible scenarios which your children could encounter during the summer.

Teens do not sequence events from beginning to end as well as adults do, and acting out scenarios can help your children think about ways to handle an uncomfortable or dangerous situation.

One of the issues that should be addressed is using marijuana. According to [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com), **40% more teens try marijuana during the summer than at any other time of the year.**

- Talk to your teen about the harmful physical, mental, and social effects of using marijuana. Young people who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50% less likely to try drugs than their peers who learn nothing from their parents.
- Set limits about marijuana use with clear consequences for breaking them. Two-thirds of teens say that upsetting their parents is one of the main reasons they do not use drugs.

The following are other issues that should be discussed at the beginning of the summer.

- The use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Dealing with sexual pressures.
- Peer pressure to participate in risky behaviors.
- Drinking or drugging and driving or being a passenger.

In addition to these discussions, the following strategies are also helpful to protect your teen:

- Monitor the activities of your teen. Teens not regularly monitored are four times more likely to use drugs.
- Be involved in your teen's life. Stay in touch with coaches, teachers, camp counselors and other adults who interact with your child. Ask them to inform you if they see any changes in your teen.
- Make sure your teen has some structure in the summer schedule. Research shows that teens who are involved in constructive and adult-supervised activities are less likely to try drugs.
- Make sure that family time is built into the summer schedule.

It can be as simple as food shopping together, taking a walk, sharing a meal or going to the movies together.

- Make a plan to deal with an emergency situation. Agree on a "code" phrase that a teen can use on a phone call to parents. For instance, "I forgot that we were having a family gathering tomorrow so I think I should come home. Meet me at \_\_\_\_\_." This really means, I am in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation.

- Set up a system to maintain good communication. An effective way to keep in touch with children in an unobtrusive way is to text message them. Text messaging allows communication that is private and not overheard by anyone, texting also enables children to give their parents accurate information while protecting them from negative comments from friends.

- Teens often meet and make new friends over the summer at camp, internships or jobs. Make sure you are aware of any new friends.
- If you are doubtful about where your child is, ask your child to take a picture of their location with their phone and send it to you.
- Tell your teens that if they are concerned about someone who has taken a prescription drug, an over-the-counter drug, excessive amounts of alcohol or other drugs, they should immediately call poison control which is available 24/7, 1-800-222-1212 or call 911.

Finally, enjoy the summer. This is a precious time to build wonderful family memories. The greatest gift that parents can give to their children is spending time with them. Share a meal, take a walk, or even camp out in the backyard. Take an ordinary event and make it really fun!

## Family Day, A Day To Eat Dinner With Your Family *September 27*

More than a decade's worth of research by Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse finds that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. The conversations that go hand-in-hand with dinner will help you learn more about your children's lives and better understand the challenges they face.

As a result of this research CASA has started a national effort, *Family Day*, to promote family dinners as an effective way to reduce substance abuse among children and teens. This year *Family Day* will be celebrated on Monday, September 27. There is additional information about Family Day at the CASA website, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org). Flyers will also be available to download at [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com).

