

Help Your Teens Stay Healthy and Safe Over the Summer

Summer vacation is almost here, which means teens will be spending more time out and about doing fun things with friends. Summertime can also mean less supervision, and a greater chance your teen will have access to alcohol, marijuana or other drugs.

When teens use alcohol, marijuana or other drugs, they can become impaired more quickly than someone who is over 21. Any impairment can lead to poor choices -- such as swimming, boating or driving under the influence, and tragic consequences -- such as drowning and vehicle crashes.

It's important to know that parents matter, even when children reach their teens. Research shows that parents, not peers, have the most influence on a teen's decisions about alcohol, marijuana and other drug use.

The following are proven ways to help prevent underage alcohol and marijuana use:

- Set clear rules for no underage drinking or marijuana use, and enforce reasonable consequences for breaking them.
- Know where your teens are at all times, and who they are with. Check in with them regularly.
- Offer to plan, host and supervise teen parties, and make sure teens do not have access to alcohol or other drugs in your home, or in the homes of friends.
- Role-play some things your teen can say if offered alcohol or marijuana.
- Remind them to never drive after using alcohol or marijuana, or accept rides with anyone who might be impaired. Discuss the possible consequences.
- Let your teen know they can call you any time for a safe ride home, no questions asked, if there is alcohol or marijuana at a party.

You might be thinking you have had plenty of conversations with your teens about alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, yet only 29% of 12th graders say their parents talk to them about these risks. Keep up the conversations and the monitoring, through the summer and through the teen years. Your influence matters.

From the desk of you School Social Worker. Information taken from starttalkingnow.org a program supported through the Washington Healthy Youth Coalition, WA Department of Social and Health Services