

**Dear Parents, Teachers, Grandparents and Friends of Ohio's Kids,**

**USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: Taking Care of Our Teens**

*This brief Parent Tip is provided at no cost by United Services for Effective Parenting-Ohio, Inc. as a tool to assist parents, teachers, grandparents and all who help to care for and to raise our children. For more information on this and other tools from USEP-OHIO refer to the conclusion of this Parent Tip.*

It is almost summer, and school's out for most Ohio youngsters for the next few weeks. We all have some changes in the responsibilities and schedules that affect our children as they learn and grow through another summer. Parents generally have mixed feelings about facing the summer months, because supervision and safety issues become critical. New plateaus in development require us to think through what we need to be prepared for, in providing both activities that are fun and mind-stretching and providing boundaries that keep our kids safe.

Did you know that every year approximately 300 teens lose their lives the night of their school prom?

Parents of teens are especially challenged because their youngsters work hard to assure mom and dad that they need no supervision, and know all the answers about how to stay safe. They are often encouraged by their pals to try new things in the warm weather, and community police tell us even good kids push the limits toward riskier behavior. They want to stay out later, hang out with their buddies, drive in open cars, and generally "cut up". Most parents can remember having fun, behaving on the edge of trouble in their past. But while some of the dangers are similar to those experienced by their parents, today's kids face some pretty scary realities.

According to the survey of almost 20,000 adolescents published in the Journal of Marriage and Family, researchers at Mississippi State University say that teens are most likely to have sex for the first time in June. This is the time of summer vacations, proms, overnight parties and trips, and summer flings. First time intercourse is usually unplanned, so parents better get busy listening and telling their children what is expected.

They are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, as well as emotional trauma. In a Youth Risk Behavior Survey published by the Ohio Department of Education, 47% of teens admitted to having sexual intercourse. It is suspected that this percentage has increased and likely is higher if other kinds of sexual encounters are included.

Teens have a high risk of injury in the summer because they are out of school, have less supervision, are often driving their own cars, staying out late, at risk for drug or alcohol use and also have a sense of being invulnerable. Nearly one of four new users of marijuana under age 18 say they started in June or July, according to data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. They are more likely to have the most serious firecracker injuries on the Fourth of July, and be seen in emergency rooms. Compared to other age groups they are less likely to take even basic precautions like wearing seat belts, bicycle helmets, or life jackets. Car crashes are the leading cause of injury in teens. Lane errors, speeding, alcohol use and inattention are some of the causes. Teenagers often load a bunch of kids in the car and nobody belts up.

The leading cause of death in 15-19 year olds is injury. But the best safety measure is parents. Kids still look to their parents as the best source of health information. Parents should not underestimate how important their interest in their teens can be in determining their behavior. Most kids still listen to their parents, and want them to listen to their frustrations and fears. Look for more safety information and parent tips in this issue.

**Cindy McKay**

**Parent Tips for Auto Safety –**

- Make wearing a seatbelt a requirement. It is the law. Tell kids their friends must also wear seatbelts in your family automobiles.

- Limit passengers – Most statistics show that every passenger added to the teen driver’s car increases the risk of a crash.
- Know where your teenager is going, and discourage “driving around”.
- Make sure your teen shares responsibility for part of the cost of gasoline and care. Shared ownership encourages responsible feelings.
- Offer to drive the gang at night. Your teen may be relieved to have a safe ride and to offer his buddies a ride. (The fatal crash rate for 16 year old boys jumps from 15 per million miles traveled in daylight to 51 per million miles traveled at night.)
- Remind your teen of the risk of serious injury such as being paralyzed or scarred. Ask them to imagine how their lives would change.

#### **Parent Tips for Drinking and Drug Use –**

- Network with other parents so you share rules and responsibilities, and know where the parties are.
- Require phone check-ins every couple of hours.
- Set boundaries ahead of time. Tell teens they will lose their license (to your care) if you find they have driven friends under the influence, or have been drinking themselves.
- Don’t leave teens unsupervised, especially overnight. Word of mouth can turn a gathering of friends into uncontrolled chaos.
- Help your teens find the right words to deal with their friends. When pressured, teens respond better if they have practiced the words they will use. “I don’t want to lose my driver’s license.” “I could get kicked off the team.” “I’ll pass this time.” “Count me out.”
- I encouraged my kids to tell their friends, “My parents find everything out. I don’t want to get grounded.” It was often a way out to blame us, so they did not have to seem “uncool”.

#### **Parent Tips for the Danger Of Drowning –**

Youngsters are likely to go swimming or boating with friends everywhere from Lake Erie to Buckeye Lake or the local gravel pit without supervision or knowing the body of water. Teens underestimate the dangers of hypothermia or hidden rocks.

- Encourage teens to swim at beaches with lifeguards. Introduce them to state and local parks and pools.
- Encourage teens to take water safety classes.
- Set a good example and wear a life vest when out on the water.
- Buy your teen a life vest if you know that boating is a possibility this summer.
- Tell teens the stories you know about people injured diving into shallow waters, injured on rocks, drowned while fishing or “horsing around” in a boat or on the beach, or lost because of hypothermia or alcohol abuse.

#### **Parent Tips for Basic Health Needs -**

Sunburn may seem relatively tame compared to some of the other dangers. But teens with sunburns are much more likely to get skin cancer in their future. A large national study of kids 12-18 found that only a third said they normally use sunscreen. More than 80% of kids reported a sunburn at least once during the previous summer. Over one third got sunburned three or four times, according to *Journal of Pediatrics*, and increases risk of skin cancers.

- Buy teens sunscreen with a protective factor of 15-30. Look for chic bottles, not those designed for little children.
- Tell teens that 12 to 18 is a crucial time for skin moles. The greater your sun exposure, the greater your chance of getting moles that teens often do not like. They can be precursors of melanoma.
- Don’t let teens go to tanning booths. The *Pediatrics* study showed that the more times tanning booths are used, the greater the risk of melanoma. More than a third of teen girls use tan booths.

- Help teens find sunless tans that work for them. There are many available that are realistic looking, and safe for their health.
- Remind teens that everyone, no matter how dark his or her skin, needs sunscreen.

### **Parent Tips for Teens And Caffeine –**

*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* reports that caffeine intake by teenagers is associated with increased blood pressure in some adolescents. The prevalence of hypertension among youth is rising and African American adolescents have higher systolic pressure (the top number) than white adolescents. It is estimated that 68% of boys and 62% of girls aged 12 to 17 drink one or more soft drinks daily and 21 % of boys and 22% of girls consume coffee or tea on a daily basis.

Help teens find good, nutritious alternatives to coffee, soda or energy drinks.

Encourage teens to recognize the good health qualities of water, which will assist in keeping their complexion clear, and their bodies functioning efficiently.

Keep iced water in the refrigerator in the summer. Add lemon and orange slices to flavor. Find other soda alternatives.

***Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers***, a book by Maurice J. Elias, Steven E. Tobias, and Brian S. Friedlander explores how parents can guide their teens to becoming compassionate, committed, courageous adults.

### **Parent Tips for the Risk Of Smoking -**

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey of the Ohio Department of Education showed that over 70% of youths had tried cigarette smoking. Tobacco is often the first drug used by young people who later use alcohol, marijuana and other drugs. Adolescents with lower levels of school achievement, with fewer skills to resist pervasive influences to use tobacco, with friends who use tobacco, and with lower self-images are more likely than their peers to use tobacco.

Cigarette advertising appears to increase youth risk of smoking by affecting their perceptions of the persuasiveness, image, and the function of smoking.

The net effect, according to the Surgeon General's Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) is that five million people will die an early preventable death because of a decision made as a child.

- Share stories with your teen of friends and family who lost health due to smoking.
- Call your teen's attention to the other effects of smoking – heart problems, increased lines and creases in skin (due to reduced oxygen in the blood).
- Set a good example. Do NOT smoke, and encourage other family members to quit.
- Nearly all first usage of tobacco begins before high school graduation.
- Second-hand smoke is a threat to the health of everyone, especially persons with asthma and other respiratory problems.
- Nicotine is addictive. Duke University researchers found that teens whose mothers smoked during pregnancy can show signs of nicotine dependence and withdrawal after just a handful of cigarettes. Prenatal exposure to nicotine inflicts lasting damage that might leave the brain vulnerable to further injury.
- Ask you teen about friends who smoke. Discuss the costs both health risks, and financial cost. It is expensive to smoke.
- Help your teen find the words to turn down encouragement from peers to smoke.
- Discuss how much the family would spend if both parents smoked one pack each day. What else could be purchased for the same amount of money? A vacation, a car, or new furniture are examples.

### **In Conclusion – Summer Parent Tips**

- Encourage your teens to sign up for organized activities.
- Help them look for a summer job, a camp experience, volunteer opportunities or classes. Helping paint over graffiti or plant flowers in the neighborhood; be an errand person or helper for a working family; or do yard work or fixit tasks for elderly neighbors not only fill time but teach a sense of satisfaction.
- Consider serving as a parent-helper in order to partner with your teens. Community churches often take teens on work-camp experiences that broaden teens' hearts and minds, or supervise their work for older neighbors or shut-ins.

Our kids groaned, but these experiences changed their lives. Our daughter Susie worked at the Wyoming State Training School with profoundly retarded children and adults. That unforgettable experience was sponsored by the Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, thanks to youth director, Frannie Milward. Frannie also drafted us as work camp parents to assist with taking a group to Hazard, Kentucky where we repaired and painted a school. Life changing? Susie decided that summer that she wanted to live in the mountains for the rest of her life. She is now an advocate for youth and family activities in a Seattle church. And many of the teenagers she led in similar mission activities "helping others" on native American reservations, even in Mexico are leading their own children and others to find themselves in service to others. The grandchildren have all grown the most during their mission experiences, including a wonderful Ugandan village building a school and caring for the children. It became an ongoing mission, and a sister congregation.

### **Teens Need To Have High Self Esteem - How Can Their Parents Help?**

In today's world, we know that youngsters must have a healthy self-esteem in order to survive. They spend much of their time making choices that depend upon their ability to sort out consequences. Having high self esteem means that you believe in yourself, accept yourself – both strengths and weaknesses, respect yourself and others, like yourself and others, trust yourself, and make your own decisions – knowing what is right, and right for you.

Discuss these traits with your teenager, and also explore what it means to have low self-esteem. They may recognize traits they see in themselves or their friends. Teens with low self-esteem lack self-confidence, do not accept themselves for who they are, do not have self-respect, may actively dislike themselves, distrust themselves, let others make their decisions because they believe that what others think is more important than what they think.

#### **Help Give Your Teen a Self-Esteem Boost.**

- Encourage your youngsters to know and explore their values. Explain that values are the things they believe in, like honesty, self-respect, and are the things they act on in their lives.
- Encourage setting realistic goals. Help them determine what they want to accomplish today, and over the summer and in the future. Help them write down their goals and make plans of how to reach them.
- Help teens to make time every day reflecting on thoughts and feelings, also doing things they enjoy like reading, writing, playing, painting or listening to music.
- Encourage your teen to take pride in him/herself. Praise him for accomplishments, and encourage him to pat himself on the back for accomplishments big or small. Encourage him to develop his abilities and to take pride in them.
- Listen to your teen. Let her know that she really matters to you and to the family. Talk together every day.
- Be positive. Express an interest in his work, school, friends and activities.

#### **More Parent Ideas Suggested by the Search Institute – Take It Another Step**

- Greet teens when you see them, ask how they are doing.
- Congratulate kids when they accomplish something.
- Ask for their opinions and perspectives.
- Spend time as a mentor, coach or other youth leader.
- Invite neighborhood teens to "hang out" in your home (when you're there). Take time to chat with them.
- Advocate for youth having safe places to spend time with friends in the community.

Look for more resources from the Search Institute [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

**Buy your teenager a journal, and encourage daily entries. It may make the summer a unique learning experience, and capture some wonderful emotional growth and mind-stretching things to talk about.**

**USEP-OHIO “CARES”**

**C is for clearinghouse activities that match programs with parents and providers.**

A is for advocacy for kids and parents issues and needs.

**R is for the resources we develop and offer on a host of topics.**

**E is for education we offer on a regular basis.**

**S is for support we give to families, professionals and advocates.**

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End May 16 Parent Tip on teens