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Teens can have a fun summer and still remain safe

Summer can be a special time for teens filled with camp, vacations, romance, summer jobs, boredom and lots of free time. For parents, however, summer vacation presents unique concerns that differ from those of the routine school year – how to manage ALL that free time and feel confident your teen is safe, while trying to maintain your own regular work and family responsibilities.

Impulsivity and risk-taking are natural parts of development in adolescence. Portions of the brain are expanding at lightening speed without yet achieving efficiency, leading to seemingly irrational thoughts and unchecked behaviors. Too much unmonitored and unstructured time can allow unhealthy creativity free reign.

Thankfully, parents who cultivate remote supervision and break up the boredom can increase the likelihood teens stay safe. Here are a few tips to help minimize the stress in your summer and maximize the fun and safety of your teen's summer:

Conduct periodic spot checks of your child's whereabouts or activities

Cell phones have done wonders for parent peace of mind, but they will not always be helpful. Calling your child to check on where he is may be effective or it may provide an opportunity to practice skirting around the edge of the truth. Your child's well-being may depend upon your cleverness and subtlety. Use all available resources. Put the inevitable tattling of siblings to good use. On occasion, casually verify that your child is where they should be by using an excuse to contact another parent or a friend of your teen. Once in a while unexpectedly return home or drop by the location that your child should be. You do not need to go overboard. The random check simply reminds your child that you are paying attention.

Expect Your Child to Do Chores Regularly

Chores have many healthy benefits. They teach responsibility. They demonstrate the importance of contributing to the household. They save you effort. And not unimportantly, *they take up time!* Expect that your teen might complain about your reasonable expectations of labor and think of the complaining as a positive. All the energy he or she spends grousing about you is effort *not* being expended getting into mischief!

Network with other Parents

One parent I knew lived in a neighborhood with many young adolescents and working parents, so they got together and agreed to have the kids rotate between one another's houses on a regular schedule. Parents then rotated supervision on a schedule as well. For some that meant taking an occasional day off, others worked odd shifts, still others paid for an older youth to monitor the group or recruited the assistance of grandparents. Everyone isn't lucky enough to live in such an accommodating neighborhood, but creativity is more likely to blossom if parents collaborate.

Provide and Encourage Boredom Busting Activities

This is easier said than done when talking about teens, especially if you are on a budget that does not allow for camps, enrichment classes or sports programs. A couple of sources are [50 Fun Things to Do in the Summer](#) or [The Big Book of Boy Stuff](#), which contains zany ideas both boys and girls will love, such as cutting into grapes and microwaving them until they create sparks. Friends can make anything more entertaining, so building positive friendships is an important part of any adolescent's summer. Cultivate healthy risk taking opportunities. Allow your young teen to take the bus or ride her bike to a new part of town for lunch. Remember that being bored once in a while *is* part of life. You need to offer a few thoughtful suggestions, but you don't have to become a cruise director.

Article by Becky Mather, Prevention Education Coordinator, Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board

<https://parenthetical.wisc.edu/2018/05/07/teens-can-have-a-fun-summer-and-still-remain-safe/>



Volunteering

Volunteering is an excellent way for youth to look beyond themselves to the larger world, to develop empathy for their fellow humans, and to give back to their communities. Volunteering is also a way for young teens to have a maturing summer experience as they meet the expectations set forth by the volunteer program. Volunteering can also provide a way to explore potential career interests and could possibly lead to a paid position down the road if positive connections are made.

Finding the right place for your teen to volunteer is essential. As with picking a camp, or applying for a summer job, your teen should take the responsibility for finding a volunteer opportunity; however, your help and input may be necessary, especially for young teens who may need permission or help with transportation. Most teens work best in volunteer situations that are well structured, project oriented, and supervised. Volunteering together may be an excellent opportunity for you to do something with your teen this summer, although be sure your teen has a central role in the project.

Many places of worship have volunteer opportunities specifically for teens, while hospitals, retirement communities and large non-profits also often have such programs.

While volunteering may be more flexible than a paid position, make sure your teen understands the extent of the commitment. As with a job, taking on a volunteer role requires perseverance, even when the work is boring. Volunteering can teach many of the same life lessons as a paid job, as long as your teen understands they are expected to arrive on time, complete the tasks set before them, and fulfill commitment to the organization.

Which types of summer programming activities did you participate as a teen? Which did you find most useful?



IS YOUR CHILD READY TO STAY HOME ALONE

Putting together a schedule of summer activities for your child can be a challenge. Like many parents, you might be trying to decide if it is safe to leave your school-age child home alone during the summer break. Your child might be ready to stay home alone if your child:

- is willing to stay alone
- acts responsibly and follows rules
- knows how to handle emergencies

UW-Madison Extension offers a free online video class called **Home Alone**. The lessons were developed to help you prepare your child for self-care.

Watch the videos together with your child at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/homealone/>

En español
<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/homealone-espanol/>

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Money Matters can be used as a self-study program or you can follow up with financial coaching. Several of [our financial educators](#) are available to talk with anyone in Wisconsin.

Visit <https://finances.extension.wisc.edu/2022/03/03/what-do-i-need-to-know-about-financial-institutions/> to learn more.

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