



Don't Relax Your Vigilance

Keep youth safe by watching for risky behaviors this summer

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To the Editor:

Each year as summer vacation begins, safety experts remind us adults of our responsibility to keep children and young people safe from a variety of dangers and risks that surround them. As a recent Child Trends research brief ([Ten Summer Child Safety Tips](#)) points out, the months of June, July and August are more dangerous for children than other times of the year, especially when it comes to accidental injuries. Sadly, nearly one third of all fatal injuries to children occur during these summer months.

It's natural for parents and caregivers to be attentive during the summer and keep a close and watchful eye out for risky behaviors as children play near water and high traffic areas and climb on trees and playground equipment. But as summer moves along, we sometimes let down our guard and relax our vigilance.

I have only one word: don't. Our children depend on us to keep them safe so that they can explore and try new experiences with confidence, knowing that we will step in to prevent them from harming themselves or others.

Our vigilance is just as important when it comes to the teens in our lives. Even though they are older and more self-sufficient, they still rely on caring adults to keep them safe and sound.

For teens, the dangers are different, but potentially just as fatal. Lurking dangers for this age group involve suicides and homicides, car crashes and drug overdoses. Parents and caring adults can be the first line of defense against such tragedies by remaining alert.

According to Child Trends, 70 percent of automobile crashes involved a teen behind the wheel in 2014. Teens simply lack driving experience. One way to remedy this situation is by using the summer months as practice driving time for your teenagers. Provide supervision as they take the wheel. This training is especially helpful during their first year as drivers, and can significantly reduce their risk on the road.

If your teen is showing signs of depression, connect him or her to a counselor or mental health professional during the summer. If your teens are more comfortable initially talking on the phone or texting, they can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or text "go" to 741-741, a text-based helpline. Teen suicide has increased almost 17 percent over the past five years, so don't wait to seek help. Depression won't just go away on its own, and it's certainly nothing shameful.

Use the summer to consider safety protocols in your home. Store guns either outside the home or in locked, secure safes, and do the same with any prescription medications, especially opioid-based painkillers. The teen brain sometimes makes bad choices, which can only be made worse by the availability of deadly weapons and drugs.



One of the best ways to keep children and teenagers safe and healthy is to gather around the table to share a family meal, good conversation and gratitude. Research shows that young people who eat meals regularly with their family do better in all areas of their lives when compared to peers who don't get this opportunity. Now that's a safety practice worth implementing!

Remember, stay alert and apply precautionary procedures such as these to make sure youth of all ages have a fun and safe summer.

John Brandon

President, Marion County Commission On Youth, Inc. (MCCOY)