



# KNOW! STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY, SAFE, AND SUBSTANCE-FREE SUMMER FOR KIDS

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Summer brings a break from school and more ways for young people to enjoy their free time. More freedom, social activities, and independence can be exciting, but they can also create opportunities for risky behaviors, including alcohol and other drug use. Summer should be fun for kids, but it should also be safe. As a caring adult, you can help the young people in your life make healthy choices while still enjoying all that summer has to offer.

The tips below offer guidance for promoting healthy summer choices for kids of all ages!



## FOR PRESCHOOLERS AND KINDERGARTENERS (AGES 0-6)

### ENCOURAGE SUMMER LEARNING

Learning continues beyond school—especially through reading. Reading helps young children strengthen skills, spark curiosity, and stay engaged. Turn walks into nature adventures by playing “I-spy” or taking plant and animal photos. Encourage creativity with crafts. Develop reading skills through your local library’s summer reading program or daily family reading time. Even everyday activities can be learning opportunities—cooking together can help children practice counting and measuring.

### MAINTAIN STRUCTURE

While summer often brings a more relaxed schedule, young children still benefit from routines and predictability. Create a flexible schedule that includes activities like story time, playground visits, playdates, and unstructured play. Consider displaying the schedule visually and reviewing it together each day so your child knows what to expect. Consistent routines can help children feel secure while providing opportunities to develop new skills.

### EMPHASIZE HEALTHY HABITS

Teaching children about caring for their bodies and minds builds healthy habits early. Talk about the ways you take care of yourself, such as eating nutritious foods, moving your body, and getting enough sleep. Explain how these habits help you feel good and do the things you enjoy. You can also introduce basic safety concepts by discussing substances that can be harmful, such as household cleaning products, and helping children understand why they should avoid them.

## FOR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN (AGES 7-11)

### TURN SCREEN TIME INTO QUALITY TIME

Eliminating screen time completely may not be realistic, but small changes can create more opportunities for connection. Look for ways to replace screen time with shared activities, such as family conversations, board games, outdoor play, or other fun activities. These moments can strengthen relationships, create lasting memories, and help prevent excessive screen time.



**PLAN WELL-SUITED ACTIVITIES**

Summer boredom is less likely when activities match a child's interests and strengths. Talk with your child about what they enjoy and look for opportunities to build those skills. Whether it's art, technology, sports, or music, interest-based activities can build confidence, encourage skill development, and create a sense of accomplishment. Strong self-confidence can also help young people resist pressure to engage in risky behaviors as they grow.

**GET TO KNOW WHO THEY'RE SPENDING TIME WITH**

Summer often means more time with friends. Make an effort to get to know your child's friends and their families, and always know where your child is and who they are with. Communicate with other parents about expectations for supervision and substance-free environments. Regular check-ins help you stay informed and show your child that their safety is a priority.

**FOR PRE-TEENS AND TEENAGERS (AGES 12-18)****SET SUMMER TIME RULES**

As teens gain independence, clear expectations help keep them on track. Talk about your family's rules regarding alcohol, vaping, smoking, and other risky behaviors before situations arise. Make sure your teen understands both the expectations and consequences. At the same time, recognize and praise responsible choices. Positive reinforcement can encourage teens to continue making healthy decisions.

**ENCOURAGE HEALTHY RISK-TAKING**

Taking risks is a normal part of teen development, but they don't have to be dangerous. Healthy risk-taking can build confidence and important life skills. Help your teen find positive outlets through activities like sports, leadership opportunities, learning new skills, or exploring new hobbies. These experiences provide growth and excitement in a safe, productive way.

**HELP THEM GET ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY**

Encourage your teen to spend time with friends while participating in your community. Volunteering, community service, and civic engagement opportunities can help young people develop social skills, build meaningful relationships, and gain a sense of purpose. Community involvement can also help teens feel valued and connected, which may reduce the likelihood of

**RESOURCES**

- [Summer Learning for Families | National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)
- [77 Things to Do Instead of Screens | Sparkle Stories](#)
- [Library Finder | CareerOneStop](#)
- [Summer Programs & Camps | TeenLife](#)
- [Official 2026 Ohio Events Guide | State of Ohio](#)
- [A positive approach to discipline: pre-teens and teenagers | Raising Children Network](#)
- [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio](#)

**SOURCES**

- [Strategies for a Successful Summer Break | Child Mind Institute](#)
- [How to Have a Successful Summer: Building Deeper Connections with Your Kids | Nationwide Children's](#)
- [Prevention Tips for Every Age | Partnership to End Addiction](#)
- [Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development - Middle Childhood \(9-11 Years of Age\) | CDC](#)
- [Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development - Teenagers \(15-17 Years of Age\) | CDC](#)
- [Healthy Risk Taking | Partnership to End Addiction](#)
- [Developmental Assets Framework | Search Institute](#)

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