

SAFE Summer: Tip sheet for Teens & Young Adults

Background

As the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic shifts into a new mode in Washington State and the mask mandates are lifted, there may be a significant desire to “blow off steam,” to relax, and have a good time over the spring and summer months. Engaging in risk-taking and impulsive behavior tends to increase in the late spring and summer months due to warmer weather, more hours of daylight, a break from school or classes, and more free time than during the school year. This document provides tips for teens and young adults that can be used to reduce harm and staying safe while still having a good time.

Common Issues

Substance Abuse



Many teens and young adults may manage distress caused by the pandemic through engaging with behaviors such as smoking, alcohol, or drug use. This can be risky for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse and dependence, driving under the influence, and potential risk of overdose.

If you decide to use alcohol or drugs, remember these safety measures:

- Know your limit.
- Have someone you trust on “standby” in case anything unexpected or dangerous happens.
- Test drugs before consuming anything you are unfamiliar with.
- For injections and intravenous drug use, use clean needles.
- Do not mix substances.

Dangerous Driving & Substance Use



Do not risk your life or someone else's life by driving dangerously. Dangerous driving may be a way of coping, or a way out of boredom for some, but the risks outweigh the positives. No matter what the circumstances are, there are safer alternatives. A good choice in one minute can save a lifetime of regret.

- Abstain from driving when you are intoxicated by having a designated driver, asking a friend or family member for a ride, or calling a car service such as Uber or Lyft.

Dangerous and Illegal Activities and Reckless Inhibitions



Participating in dangerous/illegal activities can put you at risk. You can risk your health, future, and life.

- Think twice before you do anything that endangers your safety.
- Do not enter a new situation without knowing if it's safe. Ask your friends about their plans prior to hanging out.
- Speak up and set boundaries if you are uncomfortable with an activity. Chances are good that someone else in the group feels the same way, and they are also waiting for 'someone else' to speak up.
- Know the potential consequences of the activity you are participating in. If you are not okay with the worst potential consequence, do not participate in the activity.

Vandalism and Trespassing



Vandalism and trespassing are illegal and have major consequences including fines and jail time. There are also often safety concerns with these behaviors since properties ban trespassing for concern of the physical safety and wellbeing of individuals.

- Consider other adrenaline-oriented activities such as rock climbing, paintball, or bungee jumping.
- If you express yourself artistically through graffiti, utilize other tools to depict your art through various forms. Painting personal objects such as skateboards, custom clothing design, or making digital art are great outlets for expressing creativity.
- If you desire a sensory experience, paint-splatter art is a good choice.
- Share your art with the public via social media, or by befriending other local artists, as an alternative to illegal activities.

Sexual Risk-Taking



Young adulthood is a common time to start engaging in sexual activity, which raises some risks for young adults due to their limited knowledge and experience. Sex needs to be taken seriously, as having unsafe sex can cause physical, mental, and emotional health problems for you and your partner(s).

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

- Get tested for STDs and STIs regularly if you are sexually active.
- Use condoms to deter the risk of STDs and STIs. **Note:** condoms do not prevent all forms of STDs or STIs.
- Have conversations with sexual partners about past sexual activity to inform the risks of STDs and STIs.

- Use birth control to reduce the risk of an unplanned pregnancy. There are many highly effective forms of birth control such as implants, hormonal birth control, and condoms.
- Be aware of the limits of birth control and discuss with your medical provider how any medication you are taking may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control.

Sexual Violence: In-person and Online

If you are talking to someone online:

- Do not share personal information such as your home or workplace address, or what school you attend.
- FaceTime, Zoom, or Skype the person you are interested in meeting or are communicating with to ensure they are the same person they present as online.
- Use social media verification checks.

If you are planning to meet someone in person that you have been talking to online:

- Meet somewhere public such as a park or cafe where you will not be alone with the person.
- Share your plans with a family member or friend that include where you will be and who you will be meeting.
- Ask a friend to drop you off and wait nearby. This ensures that you have a way out in case the meet-up becomes unsafe.

Peer Influence



It can be difficult to avoid peer influence as a teen or young adult, and it is perfectly normal to have the desire to fit in and be a part of a group. However, it is important to manage peer pressure if you find yourself doing things that you don't agree with or do not feel safe attempting.

- Allow yourself to say no to experiences or people you are not comfortable with. Practice this with a close friend or friends so you become more comfortable speaking up in a larger group.
- Check in with yourself when attempting new experiences or spending time with new people.
- Recognize unhealthy relationship dynamics with people around you.
- Use excuses or delay tactics if you are uncomfortable saying no.
- It is more common to do and follow what your friends do, so think about who your friends are and the choices they are making before you 'go along.'

COVID-19 Exposure



Pandemic fatigue and ongoing exposure to health measures can desensitize people to the severity of the virus and can lead to more risk-taking behavior that may increase chances of COVID-19 exposure. It is still important to consider the COVID-

19 risks involved with any activity you choose to partake in for your own health and for others.

If you are going to an event:

- Get tested before and after gatherings. There are a lot of free options for testing, and they are widely available.
- Weigh the risks of COVID-19 exposure by considering how large the event is that you're attending, if vaccines or proof of negative COVID-19 test are required, your level of comfort in the environmental setting, and so on.

Daily tips:

- Discuss any COVID-19 rules or precautions that are important to you with whoever you cohabitate with – roommates, domestic partners, family members, etc.
- Understand that contracting COVID-19 impacts not only your own health, but those around you as well.
- Get tested regularly if you interact with numerous people daily or if you feel sick.
- Have rapid tests on hand if possible.
- Quarantine if you have contracted COVID-19 and let close contacts know about possible exposures.

Virtual Hangouts



Engaging in settings that feel familiar while doing so safely online can be helpful. Virtual environments can still have a sense of realism that can bring about understood social norms in a safe place -- an integral need during this time.

- Utilize Zoom and other video conferencing platforms for social gatherings such as meetings for school and other social events.
- Utilize platforms like Netflix Party or Discord to stream shows and games to connect online.

Going Outdoors



Outdoor engagement is an important part of developing healthy habits. Although it's been difficult with COVID restrictions, these activities can boost levels of physical and mental well-being.

- Outdoor activity can greatly help with resilience related to stress.
- Engaging in exercise outside has been shown to increase rates of well-being.
- If you plan on hanging out outside with friends and family, ensure that you practice safe protocols, including social distancing, mask wearing, and testing if needed.

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