

Summer Safety Tips for your Children

Now that the school year is nearing an end, our children are looking forward to the freedom that summer brings – freedom from classes, homework, tests, and early mornings. Unfortunately, as many parents are well aware, with that freedom come new risks and dangers.

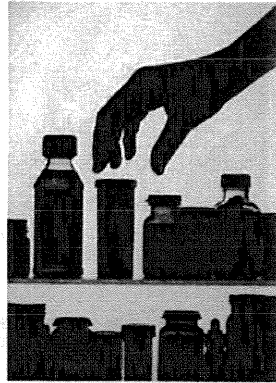
Parents, of course, can protect their children against many summer hazards such as sunburn, poison ivy, and swimming accidents. However, sometimes we overlook the fact that, without the structure and supervision that the school year provides, children are much more vulnerable to peer pressure, making bad choices, and being victimized.

Parents can only do so much to protect their children. But if you are aware of the dangers facing your kids, you'll be in a much better position to keep them out of harm's way.

Many children will be exposed to drugs, if they haven't been already. Talk to them about it – regularly. Don't worry about repeating yourself. Your child's future and safety are worth it.

Keep your prescription medications away from your children. The president recently released a report indicating that teenagers abuse prescription drugs more than cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined.

That's because they have easy access to such drugs, as they are often on the kitchen counter or in the bathroom cabinet.



Prescription drugs are also seen as being "safe" and "legal," which makes teens think they're not doing anything wrong. Finally, prescription drugs do not carry the same stigma as street drugs.

Keep your prescriptions in a safe – and secret – place, and discard leftover medications. The report included one especially disturbing statement: "Prescription drugs are the drug of choice among 12- to 13-year-olds." One way to stop that trend is to make sure that children can't get their hands on prescriptions, either at home or at the homes of friends and relatives. Remember, children who share prescription medication with their friends are also committing a crime.

Teens also abuse over-the-counter medications. Diet

-pills, stimulants, and cold/sinus remedies are easily accessible to children, as they can buy them anywhere, legally. Parents need to be aware of these dangers and educate their children about them as well.

Drugs are not the only problem facing our children, though. With all the free time and freedom the summer affords them, children sometimes make bad choices without realizing the consequences of their behavior. What they might see as a harmless prank often amounts to a crime. Don't let them find out the hard way! When they hop a fence to go swimming after hours, they could be charged with criminal trespass, breaking and entering, and disorderly conduct. If they go into a garage – even if it is open – and take beer out of a refrigerator or cooler, they can be charged with burglary. Don't let a bad decision like this turn your child's summer into their first experience with the judicial system.

Keep tabs on your children. Summertime is an opportunity for them to explore and have fun with their friends. But it also presents an opportunity for those who might do them harm. Know where your child "hangs out," because the type of individuals who victimize children already do. They know where to find children, even if you don't. Set down clear rules and boundaries

about where your child can go, their curfew, and have them check in regularly. If they have a cell phone, call them to check on them. Don't give them the option of ignoring your calls.

Most importantly, plan activities and outings with

your kids. Find things to do – preferably together – to occupy their time and minds. Your child will thank you down the road, even if they're griping about it now. And, you'll be able to rest easier, knowing that your children are safe.

SHERRI BEVAN WALSH Prosecuting Attorney County of Summit

Sherri Bevan Walsh has been our county prosecutor since 2001. In 2007, she was honored as Public Official of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers for her commitment to crime victims. In 2006, she was named Prosecutor of the Year by the Ohio Patrolmen's



Benevolent Association for her aggressive prosecution of criminals. In 2005, the Child Support Enforcement Agency, a division of the Summit County Prosecutor's Office, was awarded the Most Improved Child Support Program in the Country for its outstanding work. This year, she is serving as Vice President of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorney's Association after having served on its Executive Board for the past seven years. She was also appointed by Attorney General Marc Dann to Chair his State Victims Assistance Advisory Board.

In her position as Prosecutor, her goal is to aggressively prosecute criminals and ensure that victims receive support and assistance throughout the criminal justice proceedings. In 2007, her criminal division handled approximately 4,000 defendants who committed felony crimes in Summit County, with a conviction rate of 95 percent.

Walsh has been an attorney in the Summit County area for 22 years. She previously served as an Assistant Prosecutor for the City of Akron, a Magistrate in three Summit County courts, and as a Police Legal Advisor. She also was a partner for 10 years in the law firm of Bevan & Associates.

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Prescription Drug Abuse