



Anxiety spikes for some kids in the summer. Ideas for how you can help

By: Jenifer Patterson, Outreach & Education Coordinator

We think of the summer months as carefree and relaxing, but many kids actually experience an increase in anxiety during the break from school. Anxious kids rely on carefully crafted routines, and too little structure or shifting routines can feel overwhelming.

Karina Padilla, a child and family advocate with the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center, and previous children and youth director at the YWCA of Gettysburg, offers a few pointers for parents and caregivers of children who might be left alone for blocks of time in summer.

1. Stick with the basics, which are balanced nutrition, plenty of water and exercise, and a consistent sleep routine. During summer, kids often have less-structured schedules leading to reduced physical activity and fewer healthy food choices. Be mindful to not stray too far from a healthy balance so not to negatively affect how kids feel both physically and emotionally.
2. Teach your child who to call if an accident occurs. Post emergency contact information, make it easily accessible and ensure your child knows where it is located. Review when and how to dial 9-1-1 and what to expect if they must place a call.
3. Ensure they are safe around the house by giving the child tips on fire prevention, microwave use and living with pets. Discuss with them not to open the door to anyone that you have not approved.
4. Set limits for screen time on electronics. Leave them a daily plan of activities, chores and reading goals to give them focus and something to look forward to.
5. Encourage your child to read during the summertime. Establish a reward system and keep a reading log to celebrate goals met. Explore your local library for summer reading programs. Check www.readbrightly.com for summer reading ideas for kids of all ages.
6. Create safe spaces for outdoor play. Have an updated first aid kit on hand and review the contents with your child. Emphasize routines such as to apply sunscreen and seek shade, wear a bike helmet and stay hydrated. Help your child navigate their surroundings using landmarks, stress how to stay calm and signal for help if they become lost. Routinely talk to your child about finding a safe person to ask for help if they get lost or are approached by a stranger.
7. Summer schedules may add the use of new babysitters, summer camps, playdates, carpool and extended visits with family. There are likely to be a variety of people children will be involved with, which means it's important for adults to remain vigilant and keep open communication about body safety. Ensure your child feels safe and is not afraid or uncomfortable under the care of any of these people.

Teens are often home alone with parents working so below are four ideas specific to teens.

1. Check in with your teen via Facetime randomly throughout the day.
2. Arrange activities or craft projects that align with your teen's interests or hobbies.
3. Each day, set reasonable expectations re. chores, such as room cleaning, folding laundry, etc.

4. Arrange for your teen to spend time with friends in safe, supervised settings.

We hope all of you enjoy a safe, healthy and happy summer!

Karina Padilla's role as child and family advocate is to make the initial outreach and assist child victims and witnesses of abuse and their families. Karina believes, "Every child deserves a safe space where they can share their trauma without judgment. With proper support there is hope that a child victim and or witness can begin to heal and live a fulfilling life." Karina is bilingual and obtained a bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies from The Pennsylvania State University.