



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition  
Supported By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



**July 7, 2010 – Safe and Sober Summer**

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership Centre Region *Communities That Care*. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Summertime in Happy Valley is without a doubt one of the most pleasant times of the year. While summer is a great time for relaxing and taking it easy, parents can't afford to ease up on expectations and monitoring. The long, lazy days of summer without classes or homework mean increased free time for kids of all ages. Unsupervised, unstructured time can result in an increase in risky behaviors.

The problem of underage drinking reaches its peak in the summer. Early alcohol use has been linked to greater sexual risk taking, academic difficulties, other substance use, and criminal or violent behavior. It is also the primary contributor to adolescent death from homicide and suicide in the United States.

It is no coincidence that this is the time of year when the greatest number of teenagers die in car crashes. Teen drivers are more likely than older drivers to ride with an intoxicated driver and are more likely to drive after drinking alcohol. The sweltering summer days between Memorial Day and Labor Day have been called the "100 deadliest days" by Road Safe America, an organization devoted to making highways safer.

You can make a difference. Teens say that they rely on parents and other adults in their lives more than anyone else to help them make tough decisions and provide good advice about alcohol use. Parents who condone underage drinking are more likely to have children who engage in risky drinking behaviors. Clearly voice your disapproval of underage alcohol use.

Talk to your children about your family's rules and consequences. Make sure your expectations are clear. Lay out the consequences of breaking rules in advance. Enforce rules through punishment or other consequences.

Monitor your children and their activities. Knowing your child's whereabouts puts you in a position to make sure they are appropriately occupied, to take action to prevent risky situations, and, if necessary, to intervene in time to help them.

Be proactive about heading off drinking or other drug problems this summer. Here are some tips to help you keep your kids on the right track:

- Help plan activities to keep your child busy.
- Schedule time together to do fun things as a family.
- Check in with adult supervisors, such as coaches and employers.

☐ Touch base with hosts of parties your teen wants to attend to make sure a responsible adult will be present and alcohol will not.

Meet your child's friends, especially those that your teen hangs out with regularly.

☐ Establish a summertime curfew.

If you suspect drinking or other drug use, don't ignore it. Confront the issue with your child.

Keep talking – your kids are listening.

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