

Keeping Our Teens Safe Over Spring Break or Spring Break: Supervised? Safe? Maybe not!

Even though winter is in full force, many of our students are thinking “Spring Break.” Like all of the activities our teens participate in, parents need to monitor spring break trips to ensure that safe conditions are provided. *As parents, we often consider the potential risk and safety of many of the activities our teens are involved in during the year and that vigilance is especially crucial as our kids, even our seniors plan for their spring break.* Often, spring break trips include groups of families traveling to the same area and in some cases staying in the same hotel. As we found out last year even these “family” trips often result in large amounts of unsupervised time which can expose teens to dangerous situations. While some high school students will view such trips as a “given,” it is really our decision as parents.

A quick look at travel agency web sites paints a clear picture of the challenges parents face. One company touts trips to Mexico by emphasizing that the drinking age there is just 18 and is "rarely enforced." Another agency offers packages to Mexican beach attractions such as Cancun and Mazatlan, promising "50 hours of free drinking" over seven days. Clearly, spring break can be dangerous for young people. The U.S. Department of State fact sheet on “Spring Break in Cancun” states "alcohol is involved in the vast majority of arrests, accidents, violent crimes and deaths suffered by American tourists in Cancun."

The relaxed atmosphere of a vacation setting can sometimes lead to relaxed rules as well. Although vacations should be fun we as parents still have a responsibility to set guidelines and model appropriate behavior. Given the increased risks it is more important than ever to know our children’s whereabouts - day and night. Insist that your child check-in with you throughout the day. Set a curfew and stick with it. Talk to your student about your rules regarding alcohol and remind them that the MSHSL rules still apply. Research shows that the number one reason teens give for not using alcohol is that their parents will disapprove so don’t be afraid to set limits and keep them.

In the past, we have heard many stories about teens being allowed to go on a vacation with another trusted adult who promises to supervise. For some, supervision is checking in once a day when the vacationing teen finally rolls out of bed after being up most of the night partying. As difficult as it is to think about, the supervising adult may be looking forward to kicking back and enjoying themselves also and may not be totally present for the teens who need boundaries and limits.

It is important to remember that Eden Prairie High School does not endorse spring break trips. Instead we encourage families to take advantage of other opportunities. Often this is a time that families can really spend quality time. Seek out service trips sponsored by faith groups or volunteer organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Spring break is also an excellent time to schedule college visits.

Vacations are a time to set aside our cares and worries but not at the expense of safety and that sense of doing what we know to be in the best interest of our kids. Our role as parents is to protect our children from dangerous situations and then help them to develop skills to protect themselves. Spring break in a warm, sunny place unsupervised or undersupervised is a dangerous and difficult situation that our teens, even our eighteen year olds could find more challenging and dangerous than they ever expected and we can make the decision to protect them as parents by re-thinking this “crazy” ritual.