

Keeping our teenagers safe

2021 has been a challenging and tumultuous year in which many of our students have faced the ongoing hurdles of change. Our students spent weeks in isolation and a significant time away from their friends, navigating new and different social situations.

As we enter this six-week holiday period, and COVID restrictions are easing, we know that our students are really excited at the opportunity of interacting with their friends and peers again. Whether your adolescent is the type that would prefer a quiet evening alone with a few friends, or one who attends parties and get-togethers frequently, social gatherings are an integral part of teenage life. Talking with our students at school reveals the amount of peer pressure that is experienced around social gatherings. Many of our students, evaluate themselves and their friends based on the behaviours demonstrated during these gatherings. It seems that the issue of drinking and drugs bothers most.

We wanted to take the opportunity to share some of the insights we have with you so you can have some open conversations with your children shared with your children: keeping the channels of communication open with your children sits at the core of their safety during the holidays.

Alcohol, drugs, and young people

The Australian Government Department of Health has clear guidelines around alcohol consumption. The guidelines state that in order to reduce “the risk of injury and other harm to the health of children and people under 18 years of age, they should not drink alcohol.”

Please visit the following link for the official documents and use these as a platform to engage in open conversations regarding the choices your children will inevitably have to make over the summer holidays.

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-throughout-life/alcohol-and-young-people>

As adults, we know that choices made by young people who have been consuming alcohol or other drugs can result in decisions that can have devastating consequences. In the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey of Year 10, 11 and 12 students in Australia, 19.8 per cent of males and 28.3 per cent of females had had unwanted sex while under the influence of alcohol and drugs. We must make sure our adolescents understand that consent under the influence of alcohol may not be consent at all. As an excellent resource you may want to watch and discuss the following:

<https://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/how-do-you-talk-about-consent-with-your-kids-20210317-p57bj1.html>

In addition, the laws around vaping changed on 1 October. E-cigarettes and e-liquids containing nicotine are a prescription-only medicine. E-cigarettes are not harm-free and may expose users

and bystanders to chemicals that are harmful to health. Please see the resource below that further assist you in conversations with your children.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/tobacco/Pages/e-cigarettes.aspx>

Finally, we suggest you encourage all your children to download the emergency+ app to their phones.

<https://emergencyapp.triplezero.gov.au/>.

This app uses GPS functionality built into smart phones to help a triple zero (000) caller provide critical location details required to mobilise emergency services if they happen to find themselves in an emergency situation where they need assistance.