



Riegler, Shienvold & Associates

Mental Health Quick Notes

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Summer with the Kids

Summer is a time of rejuvenation with fewer pressures and obligations. However, many families must shift from school-related concerns to concerns about how to occupy their children and how to guide them through the summer in a relaxed but safe way. Below are a few brief articles that attempt to address the summer concerns of parents. Have a great summer!

Is Your Child Taking Medications for ADHD?

The school year is ending and summer is upon us. Does my child need his/her medications over the summer? This is a question parents often ask. Most professionals would agree that your child's ADHD does not go away over the summer. Many children will continue to have trouble functioning well in summer situations without their medications. These situations can include summer camp, vacations, swimming, trips to amusement parks and other places with large numbers of people. It is not fun or a vacation for your child or your family if your child wanders off, gets lost in a crowd, cannot control impulsive behavior, or worse yet, gets kicked out of summer camp. Don't forget your child doesn't stop learning over the summer.

Are there situations when it is appropriate to discontinue stimulant medications over the summer? First, and foremost, never discontinue any medication without consulting the prescribing physician. If your child is not eating enough and/or gaining enough height and weight, you and your physician may elect to take a break from stimulants for the summer. Similarly, you may have been contemplating a medication change with your child's physician. Summer is often a better time to do such changes as your child's stress is lower, and grades will not suffer. Lastly, a child, with milder forms of ADHD or those who do not have significant problems with hyperactivity and impulse control may be okay over the summer without their medications. Remem-

ber, making the right medication decisions should be done in partnership with your child's prescribing physician, with input from your child's therapist.

By Melinda Eash, MS

How do I help my kids with academics over the summer?

Many parents are concerned about their children and how to help them stay on track with learning over the summer. Studies show that children can lose one to three months of learning during the summer months. Some ideas to aid children in retaining information that they have learned in school include:

Making reading fun by regular trips to the library. In addition, a number of libraries schedule special summer events that can make reading enjoyable for kids.

Have kids participate in tutoring to help them work on and retain skills. Make sure that tutoring is time-limited and still allows for kids to have fun.

Consult with the classroom teacher at the end of the year to get some suggestions on what to work on with kids during the summer months. Some schools will lend text books or reading books to allow you to remediate weak skill areas.

Schedule educational outings to participate with your children such as going to the zoo, aquarium, or historical sites. When on outings or trips ask your children to read signs, read directions, calculate prices, etc., as a way to utilize their thinking skills.

Some helpful websites to get additional ideas include the following:

www.scholasticbooks.com/summerreading

www.funbrain.com

www.familyeducation.com

www.encarta.msn.com

It is important to remember that summer is for kids to relax, regroup, and have fun. Therefore, integrate learning into summer fun.

By Shanen Turk-Geller, LCSW

Navigating the Internet— Tips from the Attorney General's Office

Summer is a great time for kids, especially school-aged kids, because they get a much-needed break from the academic rigor of the school year. Schedules loosen up and there is time to explore and improve new skills. It is also a time to just hang out and do whatever comes to mind. However, with a great deal of kids today, hanging out and doing nothing are associated with tuning into a screen— a television screen, a computer screen or a gaming screen. When it comes to surfing the Internet, it is a widely known fact that kids can surf themselves into some pretty dangerous waters.

The Pennsylvania Attorney General's office reports the following statistics about the Internet and kids:

53% of teens enter chatrooms & 85% (13 million kids) use instant messaging

1 in 5 kids ages 10-17 have been sexually solicited online; and in an alarming 15% of those cases, the predator attempted to meet the child in person

89% of sexual solicitations of kids

Summer cont.

were made in chatrooms or Instant Messages

1 in 5 girls and 1 in 10 boys are sexually exploited before they reach adulthood

11 is the average age for exposure to pornography on the Web

Attorney General's Office, under the direction of Attorney General Tom Corbett, has launched *Operation Safe Surf*. Operation Safe Surf is an effort to keep kids safe as they navigate the Internet. Below are some safety tips for parents and kids to review before they go online this summer:

- **I will never give out personal information to someone I meet online.**
- **I will never agree to get together with someone I meet on the Internet.**
- **I will tell a parent, teacher or trusted adult if I see anything online that makes me feel uncomfortable.**
- **I will not open files attached to e-mails from someone I don't know. They could contain a computer virus or inappropriate material.**
- **I will not post any photos of myself, friends or family.**
- **I will not send "flames" - cyber bullying is very hurtful.**
- **Everything you write on the Internet is public and can be read by anyone online. If you want information to be kept private, then write it in your diary or journal -don't write it for the world to see. It could be read by the wrong people.**

- **You can't see or hear the people you are talking to online, so it's easy for people to lie. Someone could say she is a "12-year-old-girl," but, in reality, is actually an older man.**
- **Always remember....It's great to ride the wave of the Internet-just use your head while surfing!**

Check out these websites

www.attorneygeneral.gov and

www.netsmartzkids.org for more details

Summer Daycare Plans for Your Children: Is my child old enough to stay home alone?

Many families are faced with this dilemma every summer: Is my child old enough to stay home by himself/herself during the summer months? The real question is not as much related to your child's age, as to your child's maturity and readiness to deal with the issues that he/she might be faced with during a typical day. Some questions to ask yourself are: Are you comfortable with your child's ability to deal with safety issues or emergencies? Has your child shown responsible behavior in other areas of his life, i.e. school, extracurricular activities, etc.? Has your child felt comfortable being alone for shorter periods of time when you have been away? Are there adults available who can help your child should problems arise? These questions are addressed in more detail below.

There are some basic factors that need to be considered. First, does your child want to stay home alone? If your child is not willing and/or comfortable staying home alone during the day, it is probably best to consider daycare alternatives. Additionally, do you live in a safe home and neighborhood? If your house has some safety concerns or there have been troublesome activities in your neighborhood, it is likely not in your child's best interest to be home alone.

Once those questions have been answered, parents must determine if their child is ready and responsible enough to stay home by themselves. A child must be able to meet the physical responsibilities of staying home. Simple tasks such as knowing how to lock doors and windows, using the telephone, and operating some appliances are essential. If they are not able to be self-sufficient in these areas, they are not ready to stay home alone.

How capable is your child of reading messages and taking written directions? Can he understand and describe house rules and emergency procedures? Parents must be confident that their child can do basic problem solving and make good decisions while they are home alone. If the parents determine that their child is competent in these areas, they can consider allowing the child to stay home. Be sure your child has several alternative contacts and a place in the neighborhood where she can go for help. Parents need to post contact and emergency telephone numbers next to the phone so they are easily accessible. Also, they should rehearse with their child safety and emergency situations and how to appropriately respond. This includes who should be allowed in the house, what information to give to people on the telephone, and what to do for basic first aid and other, more severe injuries.

There is no magic age at which a child is able to stay home alone. Instead parents should assess their child's maturity, problem solving abilities, and good sense. If the parents and the child agree that staying home alone is feasible, they must prepare together for the new responsibilities. Lastly, although there is no law in Pennsylvania regarding leaving your child alone, each county has guidelines to help parents in making such decisions.

By Kasey Shienvold, Psy.D, MBA