

ODS + ENDS, May 2010

Helping Kids to Have a Safe Summer

It is officially springtime in Denver, which means most of the city's youth are almost finished with school for the year and are ready to fill the local streets and parks for the summer months. With school out of session, students have more free time, which can mean more opportunities for kids to be involved in risky activities. But, it's also an opportunity for parents to help their kids find positive activities for them to join for the summer months.

Research suggests that there is an increase in unhealthy or antisocial behavior among youth during the summer months. For example, criminal activity tends to increase during the warmer months. In Denver in 2009, the average number of offenses (excluding traffic offenses) for the warmer summer months of June, July, and August was about 3,806 per month; for the other cooler months of the year, the average number was about 3,113 per month¹. Researchers have also found that a lack of structured leisure activities (which is common during the summer months as students are out of school) is correlated with higher levels of alcohol and drug use among youth².

There are various theories as to why antisocial activity may increase for youth during the summer months.

- **Low Levels of Adult Supervision:** Most kids are out of school, and unless they are involved in highly structured programs, are unsupervised by parents, teachers, or other adults for most of the day.
- **Lack of Activity Can Lead to Boredom:** Kids without the opportunity to be involved in structured activities may become bored with excess leisure time and resort to risky behaviors such as criminal activity or alcohol and drug use.
- **Increase in Gang Activity:** Gangs are often more active and more visible in the warmer summer months. This can prove problematic and dangerous not only for gang-involved youth participating in risky activities, but can also prove to be a public safety concern for the city overall³.

Even though parents may not be around to directly supervise their children during the summer, they do have alternatives. Here are some fun ideas to keep kids safe this summer:

- **Have them participate in an organized summer sport or activity.** Look for activities that are highly structured (i.e., meet regularly, are guided by a set of rules, and are facilitated by trusted adults), will help your child to build his/her interests and skills, and bring together youth from different backgrounds.
- **Have a check-in system!** Make sure you know where your children are and who they are with at all times they are not directly supervised.
- **Talk to your kids.** Set clear rules and expectations around how you want your child to behave. For suggestions on talking with kids, specifically around not using alcohol, download a copy of the Parent Toolkit at www.denvergov.org/drug_strategies. For other suggestions on staying connected to your child, particularly during the summer months, visit the Partnership at Drugfree.org.

¹ Data Analysis Unit, Denver Police Department (2010). *Reported Offenses in the City and County of Denver By Month*. Retrieved May 24, 2010, from www.denvergov.org

² Mahoney, J. L. and Hakan Stattin. (2000). *Leisure activities and adolescent antisocial behavior: The role of structure and social context*. *Journal of Adolescence*. (23, 113-127).

³ Arlen Egly, J., & O'Donnell, C. E. (2007). *Highlights of the 2007 National Youth Gang Survey*. Washington, D: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention .