



Know! To Help Them Stay Connected

** May is Mental Health Awareness Month; encouraging families and individuals to, "Mind Your Health."*

Students (and teachers) are likely to be celebrating the close of the school year and the kickoff to summer. But as the novelty of summer break wears off, many youth may find themselves feeling isolated and alone, having lost the daily interactions and social connections that school provides. Such feelings can lead to unhealthy coping behaviors (including substance abuse) and increased adolescence risk for developing depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

According to research, low levels of social interaction not only puts a person's mental health at risk, but takes a toll on their physical health as well. Researchers report a lack of social connection to be a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure.

The fact is, people have a fundamental need to connect with other people. When that doesn't happen, or when levels of social interaction are low, it impacts both the mind and body.

Place your students at an advantage by encouraging them to create a summer plan to make, keep and strengthen their connections:

- Have them write out a short list of friends they would like to maintain or build a relationship with; ones who are positive and supportive.
- Ask them to commit to calling, texting or getting together with these friends throughout the summer, with the goal of at least one emotional connection a day (this does not include a social media tweet or post to the world in general – we're talking "real" friend connections). This also does not mean bombarding the same person with calls and texts every day, unless it is a known mutual desire.
- Urge them to openly and honestly share what's on their minds and be up front about what they are looking for when reaching out to a friend; maybe it's a sympathetic ear, help solving a problem, a fresh perspective, a good laugh or just to chat. Remind them too that parents and other caregivers are good for lending an ear, and offering a perspective that keeps their best interest at heart.
- Encourage them to show their sincere interest in their friends' lives as well, which will also help to build and foster the relationship. Even simple things like

Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

Know! urges you to encourage other parents to join Know!.

[Click here for the Know! Parent Tip Sign-Up Page.](#)

Know! is a program of:



*Lifetime Prevention
Lifetime Wellness*

Drug Free
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them asking about their friend's day or following up on a topic from a previous conversation can show they care. They should take caution on offering advice however, and only give it when they are sure it is being sought from them.

- Making social plans this summer will also aid in strengthening their connections. It could be as simple as them inviting a friend to the pool, park or a movie, or even just having a friend over to their house to hang out (under adult supervision, of course). Regardless, having an activity they can look forward to together will benefit the friendship while boosting children's spirits and increasing their energy.
- Children should also be urged to take advantage of opportunities to meet new friends over the summer through various camps or sports clinics, at the library, the pool, wherever. Encourage them not to be afraid to strike up a conversation with someone new.

Because the mind and body interact with and impact each other, it is important to take action to do what you can to protect students' mental health and promote overall whole health. Helping your students stay connected this summer will assist in doing just that.

For more information, tips and resources on *Minding Your Health*, visit <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may>.

Sources: [Mental Health America: Social Support: Getting and Staying Connected](#). [Psychology Today: Feeling It](#)
[Emotional expertise for happiness and success](#).