

Look at the calendar. Though it's only June 3 and summer doesn't officially start for a few weeks, who are we kidding?

By the end of this week, many schools are already on summer break. The rest will follow in the coming days. That means lots of free time for youth, many of whom might be unsupervised. After all, just because school stops doesn't mean parents and caregivers stop working at their fulltime paying jobs – and certainly not at the most important job of all – raising our youth to be strong and substance free. But while the kids aren't in school for the major portion of the day, what kinds of things should you be on the alert for to keep your kids healthy and safe toward preventing underage substance abuse?

Youth are heavily involved with technology. Nearly 60 % of youth surveyed said they text 20 or more times a day; and the largest percentage of those (nearly 40%) text over 40 times a day; the results were part of the 2009 Youth Survey of over 10,000 youth in grades 6, 8, and 10 in all of Lorain County's public school districts. The survey was conducted by Communities That Care of Lorain County, a community-based coalition working to prevent and reduce underage substance abuse. Nearly 20% of youth surveyed also said they watch four or more hours of television daily. And nearly 43% of youth surveyed said they spend more than 2-3 hours a day on the internet for gaming, social networking and other reasons. Meanwhile, nearly 40% of youth also said they are not involved in extra-curricular school or community-based activities.

The bottom line? Get your kids involved. Camps are offered throughout the county. Many have scholarship opportunities. Think about linking your youth up with a mentor. Kids need someone to talk to – and often it's someone who is not their parent or caregiver; having good role models has been shown to protect youth against risky behavior.

Look for activities at and promoted by the local libraries, which during these lean times, have practically become local community centers and hubs for all activities. And, if things aren't happening at the libraries, what better place to find out where they are happening; librarians are one of the greatest local resources.

Another great local resource is the Youth Pages, an online directory of resources to find safe and fun activities to get involved or places to go if you need help. You can easily find the local resource on the coalition's website: [www.ctcloraincounty.org/YouthPages](http://www.ctcloraincounty.org/YouthPages)

Check it out and let us know what you think. And have a great summer.