

momlogic

spring break discussion guide

You can't control what your kids do if they're on a trip without parental supervision. But you can help keep them safe. momlogic's Dr. Janet Taylor has some pointers on how to start the discussion with your kid.

1. Get the details. Find out who will be on the trip, the travel arrangements, and emergency contacts. Ask everything!

2. Talk to the other parents. Make sure that every parent is aware that the trip is unsupervised.

3. Have the "Share Talk" with your teen. This is when parents openly talk about their expectations, own experiences and discuss concrete resources and "what if?" scenarios. Give your teen time to listen, respond and share his or her feelings. The talk is not aimed to judge or criticize their behavior, but to establish a reasonable common ground.

4. Openly discuss safety issues. Issues of unwanted sexual contact, excessive alcohol and becoming separated from friends can be scary for your teen. Reinforce your values, rules and influence. Be honest about potentially harmful situations that are directly related to the mix of teens, alcohol and no supervision. Practice how your teen can ask for help, say no, and the need to stay in public places and with friends.

5. Be realistic. Ask yourself if you and your teen can handle the potential consequences of being unsupervised with other teens in a "let's go crazy" atmosphere. Past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. Don't fool yourself.

Here are some other discussion points:

PREVENTION

"I love you, and that's why I'm not sending you on this trip."

"If your child has already demonstrated problems with drugs, alcohol or promiscuous behavior, do not send them away from home on their own," warns family counselor Rosanne Tobey. "That said, all parents should think twice before paying for their kids to go on a trip like spring break. It's like sending your kid into a bar, telling them not to drink, and then getting mad when they do." One expert agrees. "Your role as a parent is not to convince your child not to go. It's to protect your child."

"I'm going with you."

Consider offering them cash instead of plane fare or even going with them on spring break. Or "offer a great alternative that provides competition for spring break," says Rabbi Sherre Hirsch. "If you can take a vacation somewhere exciting with them and four of their friends, do it."

PERSPECTIVE

“What do you think will happen on the trip?”

“Don’t just lecture them about the things that can go wrong,” says one expert. “Talk to them about your—and their—fears and hopes. Ask them what their friends are doing. Open the lines of communication.”

“I know you won’t go crazy, but your friends might, and if something happens, you want to be sober enough to take care of them.”

Child safety expert Samantha Wilson suggests changing the focus from what you want to what your child wants; in other words, “appeal to their desire to feel confident and in control.”

“If you get drunk or high and get into an accident and end up in the hospital, you won’t be able to play football [or be in the school play or whatever they care about].”

Put the dangers in terms that are important to them. “Kids respond more to short-term consequences than long-term,” says Momlogic Pediatrician Dr. Cara Natterson. “Short-term risks matter more to them than ‘you could die.’ They just don’t think that can happen to them.”

PROTECTION

“Here are the guidelines for your trip.”

“You can make rules,” says Tobey, “but be aware they might get broken. If you do let your child go, it’s more important to arm them with street smarts.” Tobey’s top four tips:

1. Stay with your group of friends— never leave with someone you don’t know.
2. Stay in public places.
3. Do not leave your drink unattended.
4. Keep your cell phone on and call for help if you need it.

“Listen to your instincts.”

“Girls, especially, tend to be afraid of being rude,” says Wilson, “so instead they put themselves in unsafe situations. If it feels wrong, it is. They need to hear it’s okay to be blunt and walk away.”

“You can call me *no matter what happens.*”

“Make sure your kid and their best friend has your phone number,” advises Hirsch, “and that they know they can call if something goes wrong and you will not judge. Later—a lot later—you can talk to them about it. But in the moment they have to know that you will take care of them.”

“Let’s talk again.”

Don’t just talk to them once -- remind them. “They’ll groan,” says Tobey, “but if you put the guidelines in the forefront of their minds right before they leave, they’ll be far more likely to think of them when they’re deciding what to do in a bad situation.”