



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Michael Grose

How to keep your teenager safe during Schoolies Week

So your young person is about to go Schoolies Week!

Have you had those talks with them yet?

You know the conversations about not drinking too much. The conversations about looking after yourself and not making an idiot of yourself. The conversations about being smart, not stupid; about not following the crowd; about looking out for drink spiking; and oh, the one about not getting sunburnt?

As a parent you want your young person to have a great time; but you also want them to come home safe, sound and in one piece.

You also know that they'll be in a place and headspace that is about as far away from the protection of their parents as they've ever been. So it may help, at least for your peace of mind to reinforce some key messages before they leave the relative safety and stability of home.

Messages such as:

1 Don't overdo alcohol because you want to remember it

This message is obvious but what may not be so obvious are the dangers of drink spiking. If you haven't done so already talk about the dangers of spiking and

encourage them to do a risk assessment of the place they are in and the crowd they are among before drinking.

2 Look out for leaches

Schoolies attracts all types including toolies and other leaches for sex, a good time and, in some cases, a fight. Girls are obvious targets for sex, while drunk guys and those with big mouths are at greatest risk of violence.

3 Look out for your friends

Keep an eye out for your mates' should be a mantra reverberating around your young person's head long before they head to Schoolies. It also means that kids should tell their friends what they are doing, who they are with, what they are drinking and the details of any drugs they are taking. It will most likely be a friend that will take a young person to an ambo to have their stomach pumped; deal with a drug issue or search for them if they go missing.

4 Attend Schoolies Only events

Most councils around the country have Schoolies Only events that are run with young people's needs and safety in mind. Choose these to minimise risk.

5 Drink plenty of water

Dehydration is a big issue for young people at Schoolies events so reinforce the Drink Plenty of H2O message. It's also a smart move to drink heaps of water before drinking alcohol to prevent over consumption of alcohol.

6 Seek out support from Red Frogs and other youth support providers at events

Red Frogs are a Schoolies Best Friend. When a young person gets in any type of trouble they should seek out a friendly Red Frog who can help get them out of a jam. They are easy to spot. You guessed it – they are decked out in red and they are everywhere.

7 Have a back-up plan

The best of plans fall through. Friends don't arrive when they should. Wallets, purses and mobiles get misplaced. People get lost, literally. It's great to know in advance what to do in these types of emergencies. Also a \$20 note and a phone card tucked away in a pocket is a good idea. And oh, they should be able to call you or another trusted adult if they do get into trouble.

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8 There's safety in numbers

Young people on their own are vulnerable to sexual assault; targets for unsolicited violence especially if they are drunk or drug-affected. Encourage them to stick with their mates and recognise that being on their own for any length of time is a high-risk activity.

9 The trouble with crowds

Crowds can be mindless and dangerous. Brawls can break out and bottles thrown. Encourage young people to do a quick risk assessment whenever they are in crowd. They should check out who they should they stay away from and know where the Help Points are if they get in strife.

10 When 'Just Say No' is not enough

Discuss places where girls are vulnerable to unwanted sex or sex they'll regret later. This is most likely to happen when they are in someone else's room by themselves, on the beach or walking home at night from an event.

11 Be ready for boredom

Young people can be easily bored on Schoolies Week. They can't party 24/7. They need other activities and also downtime to help them appreciate and stay fit for the social times.

12 Recognise pre-Schoolies pressure

There's a lot of build-up to Schoolies Week. Over-enthusiastic peers fuel much of the anticipation. Remind young people that this is just one week in the rest of their lives and that life actually will get better after the pressure of school and the release of Schoolies Week has passed.

So if you haven't done so already, start talking!

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