



Keeping Kids Safe During the Summer Months

The last days of school are always a special time for kids as the first days of summer vacation are right behind — calling them outside to sunny, unstructured days of play. Many positive childhood memories are made during the summer months. As parents and caregivers, we need to be aware of both the common and unique dangers during this season and take appropriate steps to keep our children safe.

POOL SAFETY

Swimming pools provide a welcome respite from summer heat. Unfortunately, every year children drown in pools. The most common reason for those drownings is a lack of supervision by caregivers — either by leaving the children alone

momentarily or being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol which impairs their ability to supervise or intervene appropriately. Children should never be left unsupervised in pools, not even momentarily, as young children can drown within 25 seconds.

You can ensure safety in the pool by having an assigned “watcher” at all times. A good way to do this (especially if this duty will be passed off between adults) is to make a laminated “watcher” card to identify the person charged with that responsibility. Whenever the watcher needs to step away (even for a moment), they should pass that card/responsibility to another responsible adult until they return. The responsible adult/watcher should refrain from using alcohol or drugs.

When allowing your children to swim at a friend's house, ask the adults how they plan to supervise children in the pool appropriately. Consider staying with your child to assist with watching the children.

WINDOW SAFETY

When the weather warms, windows are open more often. Unfortunately, this means an increase in injuries children suffer from falling out of windows. Here are a few tips to keep children safe around open windows:

- ▶ Don't rely on screens. Screens cannot withstand the weight of children pushing or leaning on them.
- ▶ Install child safety window guards. Use ones that have an emergency release device so they can be removed easily in case of a fire.
- ▶ Install window stops. This allows windows to open only a few inches.
- ▶ Keep beds and other items children climb on away from windows. A child bouncing on a bed could fall against an open window screen, which cannot withstand the force.
- ▶ Always supervise young children around open windows.

FIREWORKS SAFETY

The Fourth of July is a time of celebration. Keep the memories positive by ensuring safety measures are in place for children.

- ▶ Give young children glowsticks instead of sparklers. Sparklers can cause severe burns to children.
- ▶ Make sure children stay a safe distance from lit fireworks. Assign someone to watch kids in a designated area.
- ▶ Talk with children about the dangers of fireworks, so they understand why they must remain cautious and stay far away from them.

HOME ALONE

Once summer arrives, many parents and caregivers look to the law to help decide when their child can be left home alone. In fact, there is no "legal age" when a child can, or should, be left alone. The right answer varies from child to child. The key factor is your child's ability to keep themselves safe when alone.



Here are some things to consider when making this important decision:

Age and maturity. How has your child shown responsibility in the past? Is your child able to care for themselves? Does your child obey rules and make good decisions?

Your child's feelings. How comfortable is your child with being alone? Is your child afraid?

Time. How long will your child be alone? Will it be during the day or evening? During a mealtime or bedtime?

Other children. How many children will be in the home without an adult? How do the children get along? Is the older child able to care for younger ones?

Safety. How safe is your neighborhood? Do you have a plan for emergencies? Does your child know their address, phone number, and how to call 911 if needed? Can your child contact you at all times while you are away? Who else is available to help in an emergency (a neighbor, for example)?

If you have decided your child is ready to stay home alone, here are some suggestions:

Start with a trial period. Leave your child alone for a short time while you are nearby and see how they manage. If your child has never been left alone before, be mindful when selecting the best time to try it, perhaps while you run a quick errand or two. You know your child and family, so you need to determine what will work best.

Role play. Act out possible situations to help your child learn what to do. A good example would be acting out a scenario where someone comes to the door or calls when your child is left alone. This will prepare them to deal with unplanned events.

Establish rules. Make sure your child knows what is and what is not allowed when you are



not home. Many parents find that having a chore list to keep kids busy is a good strategy.

Check in. Call your child while you are gone or have a friend stop by to check on your child.

Talk about your child's feelings. Encourage your child to share their feelings about staying home alone and address any concerns.

Don't overdo it. Even a mature, responsible child should not be alone too long or too often. Consider community centers or church activities to keep your child busy and supervised when you are away from home.

Have emergency phone numbers easily accessible. Show your child where the phone numbers are. The numbers of the local police and fire departments are good ones to have on hand.

As a neighbor, you may be concerned about children left alone over the summer. Here are some tips from PFSA's Front Porch Project®:

Establish a relationship with the child and parents, if you don't already know them. Plan get-togethers so people get to know each other.

If appropriate, offer to be the emergency person who a child can call or go to if they need help.

Ask a child to help you with a yard project or join your family in an activity. Check with the child's parents first, of course, and be creative with ways to interact with neighborhood kids.

Tell parents about community programs that they may not have heard about or considered previously.

Keep an eye out for all the children in your neighborhood. Have an open dialogue with parents and older children if you are concerned. This is also how you can offer kudos to parents when kids do positive things!

When school is closed for the summer, there may be fewer people looking out for a child's safety. Becoming aware of the children around you, and making a commitment to get to know your neighbors, can go a long way toward keeping kids safe — no matter what time of year it is.



Talking to Kids about Racism and Police Brutality

Our country, communities, and homes have all been touched either directly or indirectly by the reality of inequality and hate, but **we have the power to change that**. Every one of us can be the change we wish to see by denouncing hate with love. Having conversations that facilitate change must start in our homes and spread to our communities.

These talks need to include children in age-appropriate ways. We have added resources to our website that professionals and parents can use to start those sometimes-difficult conversations with children.



USING PREFERRED PRONOUNS

Adam Smith, Director of Prevention Programs

June is Pride Month, which commemorates the historic Stonewall Riots of 1969. While we have come a long way from activist Ms. Marsha P. Johnson's "shot glass heard round the world," there are things that still need to be addressed. One of these issues is preferred pronouns.

Everyone remembers pronouns from grade school, but as a refresher: They are defined as "a word that can function by itself as a noun phrase and that refers either to the participants in the discourse or to someone or something mentioned elsewhere in the discourse," such as: he, she, or they.

While we all use pronouns daily, you may not realize there are people who don't use gender-specific pronouns (he/she). Instead, they may use their given name as a pronoun. Others prefer the most common gender-neutral pronouns, they/them. Some may prefer less-common pronouns, sometimes referred to as "neo pronouns," like ze (pronounced zee)/sie (see)/zie (zee)/hir (hear).

So, you may be asking yourself: "Self, why are these pronouns so important?" That's a great

question! Pronouns are important because asking and correctly referring to someone by their desired pronoun is the most fundamental way to demonstrate consideration and respect for others. Referring to someone with the incorrect pronoun can result in feelings of dismissal, dysphoria, disempowerment, and an overall devaluation of identity. Refusal to acknowledge and respect pronouns undermines the respect that all individuals deserve.

Now, you might ask, "How do I learn someone's pronouns?" The answer is very simple: Ask. It really is that easy. Just ask. You can say, "What pronouns should I use to refer to you?" or "Which pronouns do you use?" If they told you before, you can always ask, "Can you remind me of your pronouns?" Doing this may make you feel uncomfortable or uneasy, but the other person will appreciate it, and the action helps avoid other uncomfortable situations that come from making assumptions or discovering you made a mistake later.

If you do use the wrong pronouns, no one is going to be mad at you — as long as it isn't done on purpose, and it doesn't happen

repeatedly. Changing the pronouns you use for someone you've known for a while can be challenging, especially when you use a new pronoun for the first time. It can feel daunting to use "them" for the first time, but it will become more familiar.

Mistakes happen. Just acknowledge the mistake with an apology, use the correct pronoun, and move on with the conversation. Don't make a big deal out of it, and don't make excuses! Saying things like "this is difficult" unfairly makes you into the "victim." Changing behaviors is always hard, but you know what's even more difficult? Having to correct people on your pronouns multiple times a day.

It's not easy, and it will take time, but I know all of you have it in you to give this a shot! If you have any questions or need pointers or training on this, please reach out.



In the words of Ms. Marsha P. Johnson, "I got my civil rights."



Trainer Spotlight: Brian Weir

Brian M. Weir, M.B.A., is a Program Specialist II at Franklin County Children and Youth Services (CYS) and has worked for Franklin County CYS since 2009. He has served as a criminal/child abuse investigator and family advocacy team member for the United States Army and worked with at-risk youth and families since 1997. Brian has trained for the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center and currently trains for PFSA and the PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics on recognizing and reporting child abuse. In his off time, Brian is an avid hiker and outdoorsman and likes to spend time with friends and family as well as his dog, Cody.

We appreciate the wealth of knowledge Brian brings to each training he provides to mandated reporters. Thank you, Brian!



Dr. Erica Weiler-Timmins



Maureen Fairbanks



Mauricio Conde

SPECIAL THANKS TO PFSA DIRECTORS for Completing Their Board Services

Erica Weiler-Timmins was appointed to the PFSA Board of Directors in 2014 and has completed six years of active board service. Dr. Weiler-Timmins has served on PFSA's Governance and Planning Committee, has been the Vice-Chair, and has recruited community volunteers to serve on PFSA's Finance Committee.

She has been a strong ambassador for PFSA through her work as the Director of Psychological Services and Training at the Milton Hershey School, serving at-risk youth by becoming a trainer of PFSA's acclaimed training program on child abuse recognition and reporting. Through her efforts, the staff at the Milton Hershey School have received comprehensive information to best protect students from maltreatment. Thank you, Erica, for your service!

Maureen Fairbanks also concludes six years of active board service and has spent several years leading PFSA's personnel committee. Maureen

is a seasoned human resource professional with Capital Blue Cross in Harrisburg and has assisted PFSA by volunteering her time and skills related to PFSA personnel policies and succession planning. Maureen has been a strong advocate for PFSA by volunteering at various events. Thank you, Maureen, for being a "Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids!"

On June 5, **Mauricio Conde** was appointed Vice-Chair of PFSA's Governing Board of Directors. Mauricio is the Vice President of Business Development and Operations for TLR Business Solutions, a certified small minority business, providing consulting services to Medicaid Managed Care Health Plans.

Mauricio gives back to the community in many ways and has served on the Board of Directors for several nonprofit organizations in addition to PFSA. He volunteers within his community and at his church and is also an accomplished musician. Thank you for your leadership, Mauricio!

An Interview with... **Peter G. Gurt**

Milton Hershey School President



Ann Moffitt, ACFRE and PFSA's Development Director, had the opportunity to interview Peter G. Gurt earlier this month. Gurt is an alumnus ('85) and the current President of the Milton Hershey School (MHS)—a dedicated partner and sponsor of our PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids awards, celebrating those Champions who have done great things to keep PA's children safe.

Ann: Why is PA Family Support Alliance important to you?

Peter: I have great respect for the mission and values of PFSA, as do all of us at Milton Hershey School. Our goals at MHS align with those of PFSA, as we strive to be champions for all of our students and work hard to provide a safe and nurturing environment on campus. PFSA has played an integral part in helping to train our staff and volunteers to serve as mandated reporters. Through this training, our employees are not only well-informed but empowered to report child abuse and neglect.

PFSA has also led advocacy efforts across Pennsylvania and has contributed to valuable legislation that protects children throughout the commonwealth. These efforts are critical to the safety and wellbeing of children everywhere, including those we serve at MHS.

Ann: What does it mean to you to be a Blue Ribbon Champions for Safe Kids Sponsor?

Peter: We are both proud and humbled at MHS to be a Blue Ribbon Champion sponsor. It is always our focus at MHS to take a proactive role in the welfare of children — and we stand with all businesses, schools, and organizations

that do the same. We were very much looking forward to this year's award ceremony at the Capitol. PFSA's annual flag planting in Harrisburg is a special event and a powerful tribute to the children in Pennsylvania who have been lost due to abuse.

As responsible citizens and organizations, we must do all we can to ensure Pennsylvania children can safely grow, thrive, and enjoy successful lives — free from abuse of any kind.

Ann: We all have a role to play as part of our communities in keeping kids safe. How does this relate to the activities of your organization?

Peter: Our number one priority at MHS is to provide a safe, caring, and supportive place for our students to flourish. From our nurturing houseparents to our dedicated teachers to our vigilant Campus Safety team, our MHS community works tirelessly to safeguard the welfare of our students. We also encourage our students to select a trusted adult on campus that they can turn to for support and help.

As all of our students come from poverty, we recognize they have already experienced considerable hardships in their lives. They deserve the chance — as do all children — to go forward, living and learning without fear of abuse. That's why at MHS, we are forever focused on the safety and wellbeing of our students.

We applaud PFSA, its staff, and volunteers in standing up for kids and for creating a better and safer future for all Pennsylvanian children.

Sustainable Contributions

Setting up a reoccurring donation takes just a couple of minutes. Simply visit www.pa-fsa.org/donate and tell us the amount and frequency of your gift. **Your weekly, monthly, or annual support helps us #ProtectPAKids from abuse and neglect.** For more information on donating to PFSA, please contact Director of Development Ann Moffitt, ACFRE, at 800-448-4906 or amoffitt@pa-fsa.org.



PFSA Training Options for Summer

PFSA'S TRAIN-THE-TRAINER FOR MANDATED REPORTERS

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) realizes the immense responsibility organizations have to prepare staff to be knowledgeable, proficient, and confident in their roles as mandated reporters of child abuse. PFSA's Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse Train-the-Trainer (TTT) Program helps organizations build and expand in-house expertise and capabilities to offer Mandated Reporter Training.

The initial training is two full days of instruction and practice, utilizing a comprehensive Trainer's Guide. In addition, we provide free update trainings whenever there are amendments to the CPSL and ongoing technical assistance regarding mandated reporting. Your organization enters into a three-year partnership with PFSA in order to ensure continuity of training and availability of resources.

To find out more about this program, please email Haven Evans, Director of Training, at: training@pa-fsa.org.

FRONT PORCH PROJECT® IS HERE JUST IN TIME FOR SUMMER!

The Front Porch Project® is a community-based prevention initiative based on the belief that everyone can *and should* become more aware of how to help protect children and support families in their own communities.

This training provides training to help prevent abuse and neglect before it occurs, facilitates supportive discussion for navigating difficult situations, and helps individuals identify when and how to get involved in situations involving a child — all while participants increase their comfort level with intervening in situations of concern.

Training is available in two formats:

- ▶ An eight-hour Train-the-Trainer course
- ▶ A three-hour custom-tailored community presentation

You can choose the format that best suits your needs and your organization. Sessions will start this summer! Contact Adam Smith, Director of Prevention Programs, at training@pa-fsa.org for more information or to schedule your training.