

Legal landmines from kids' summer shenanigans

BY JEFF ISAAC

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With the summer school break upon us, now is the time for parents to consider how they can keep their tween through teen-age child in line and out of hot water amid the glut of seasonal down time. There are many unforeseen legal pitfalls parents should be aware of.

While specific laws and policies vary from state to state, parents should heed these key legal considerations to better assure children use good judgment as they commiserate with their friends and otherwise enjoy their summer break:

1. Curfew: Most parents have no idea of the laws relating to curfew in their region, which vary from city to city. Generally, 10 pm is the most common curfew time, however there are exceptions of when a minor can be out by themselves at night. Breaking curfew can result in legal consequences such as the child being temporarily detained by police or community service for repeat offenders.

2. Graffiti and Vandalism: Some may see it as a form of self expression, but those who mark up community walls and building with graffiti are breaking the law. Kids who are repeat offenders here may find them self financially liable, and may face criminal penalties. Parents are also often found financially liable when their kids damage, destroy or deface the property of others, sometimes to the tune of thousands of dollars in reparations.

3. Underage Drinking: In a recent survey, nearly one

in two 9th graders reported they had consumed at least one alcoholic beverage at some point. Forty percent of the 11th graders surveyed admitted drinking enough alcohol to become "drunk" or "sick." There are a litany of legal offenses associated with minors and alcohol or drugs, which range from misdemeanors, felonies and juvenile hall. This in addition to the threats to the child's health, safety and well-being.

4. Tobacco Use: It's been reported that one in five high school seniors smokes at least once a month. In most if not all states, it's juvenile court, or as a misdemeanor. Most retail outlets also check the identification of anyone seemingly under the age of 18 attempting to purchase tobacco products, so misdemeanor charges could apply if a minor uses a false ID to make such a transaction.

5. Web Surfing: Sure, your children chat with friends and play games in cyberspace, but they also have access to a world of information only appropriate for mature audiences. Pornography is rampant on the Internet, and your child can access that material with just a few easy clicks of a mouse. Even if unsolicited, a recent survey found that one in three children ages 10 to 17 had been exposed to unwanted sexual material online. Parental control software is paramount if you are unable to supervise your child while he or she Web surfs.

Jeff Isaac, principal attorney at The Lawyer in Blue Jeans Group, is also the author of "The Wacky World of Laws" - a paperback that takes a lighthearted look at laughable laws and comical court cases in America and beyond. Jeff may be reached, and the book may be ordered, online at



Avoid a miserable summer - find your teen a job

BY MALCOLM GAULD

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Unemployment statistics are continuing to rise in the United States, and the jobless rate may affect more than the adults in the community.

Teens, who would normally take a summer job to make some cash for fun

and for the upcoming school year, may find themselves in a tight spot.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the current teen unemployment rate is 21.7 percent, up from last year's 15.8 percent - the highest rate in nearly 20 years.

This summer, your teenager may encounter the challenge of older, more experienced job seekers competing for positions in a tight economy, and may come up empty.

"The thought of our sons or daughters lying on the couch watching TV all summer long is simply not a possibility," says Laura Gauld, co-author of *The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have* and co-founder of TBJ parenting seminars.

"Parents know that kind of behavior can lead to boredom, bad habits, and low self-esteem, and they worry."

What can parents do to support their teens through what may be a summer of

unemployment, so that the family may continue to enjoy the season?

Malcolm Gauld is president of Hyde Schools, known widely for their unique approach to helping students develop character.

"Parents can look at this situation with an eye to short- and long-term goals," said Malcolm, "and stay close to their priorities."

"We believe in turning obstacles into opportunities, and this is a prime example. Short term, it's only one summer. However, long term, it's about an attitude toward life and its challenges. So raise your expectations for your kids."

In the event that your teen cannot locate a summer job this year, the Gaulds offer several suggestions.

FIND A MENTOR. Teens and their parents can seek out a mentor - a family friend, business or community leader - to work with voluntarily, learning their business, and helping them in whatever way they can. This opportunity would be scheduled, like any job, and keep your teen engaged. He or she would continue to learn new things and gain valuable experience for the future.

VOLUNTEER. There are neighbors, churches, and community centers all around, and they need help. Call and volunteer for filing, clean-ups, aiding shut-

ins, helping the elderly with lawn work and other activities.

ASSIGN A PROJECT. Parents can offer their teen an important task to do at home, and pay them something for it. Whether it's painting the garage or planting a garden, it needs to be done well. Teens can gain self-esteem when entrusted with an important project at home.

"All kids need to be responsible for jobs, whether in the community or at home," adds Laura. "And they respond positively to feeling needed."

The Gaulds also suggest a Three Point Plan for the family that will help them as individuals and as a unit.

1. Weekly family meetings. Take charge and schedule a weekly family meeting where everyone is invited to share ideas, thoughts, challenges, stories. Communication remains very important through this time.

2. Jobs. Everyone in the family needs a job, and as a member of the family, teens are no exception. All members must take on part of the responsibility of creating a clean, welcoming, and organized home.

3. Mandatory Fun. This is a time (you determine how often) when the family comes together to do something fun.

Family members take turns choosing the activity, and even if there is resistance among family members, for example, they do the activity, enjoy themselves, and learn about each other.

The Gaulds underline these points by reminding parents to "be the parent."

In the end, parents can show their kids how to continue to grow as people, as family members, and as citizens, regardless of the economy by sticking with core values.

"The strongest relationships are those resting on a foundation of principles," said Malcolm.

To learn more about the Gaulds and their work, contact Rose Mulligan at 207-837-9441 or visit greatparenting101.com and www.hyde.edu.

*Malcolm Gauld is the president of Hyde Schools, a network of public and private schools, whose unique approach to character education has been featured on PBS, NPR, 60 Minutes and other national media outlets. Recognized as one of the nation's leading experts on parenting and character education, Gauld uses humor and personal experience to convey his practical, insightful, and timely messages to a wide mainstream audience. Gauld is also the award-winning author of the book *The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have*.*