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*Pediatric Pearl*

*Date: 6/12/23*

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### **Working with Families to Plan for Summer**

Summer is fast approaching! As we meet with children and families, we may wish to consider helping them plan for and manage less-structured summer months.

Humans benefit from structure, routine, and consistency. On the most basic, biological level, our bodies function through rhythm and consistency. When bodily functions like our heart beat, breath, or digestive system cease to follow their natural rhythm it can cause people to feel physically or mentally dysregulated. The innateness of these processes may contribute to external factors providing a sense of calm or wellness as well. Consider for a moment the effects of listening to the waves at the beach, taking a walk, many forms of exercise, or listening to music. These activities are often soothing and also involve routine, consistency, and repetition.

If we zoom out a bit to consider how a person functions in their environment, we find a similar need for consistency and routine. While the majority of people benefit from these elements, young people are perhaps the population most needing consistency and most at the whims of others to create it for them. For young people one of the most significant sources of consistency and structure is school. While summer break offers opportunities for fun, being out of school also decreases routine and supervision, and increases risks of food insecurity and social isolation. The summer months can put strain on parents as well who may need to shift their work schedules to accommodate summer plans. We can help families prepare for the summer months by:

- Discuss creating routine and consistency at home. Some ways of doing this include maintaining consistent bedtime and wake time, consistent meal times, having a family calendar, and setting appropriate and consistent limits around screen use.
- Asking about plans for supervision over the summer.
- Discuss supervision needs with parents using your clinical judgment about what is indicated for the child based on their developmental needs.
- Check ACO Social Determinants questionnaire for concerns about food insecurity. If the family is reporting food insecurity, consider providing them with resources like a link to the Food Bank of Western MA. Many schools also offer summer meal programs the family may be interested in exploring. <https://www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/food-pantry-meal-program-schedule/>
- Encourage young people to spend time outdoors, be mindful of screen time, and maintain social connections.
- Young people who are supported by a school-based counselor may not have access to that support over the summer. If they are interested, consider a referral to PCBH.
- Parents who express overwhelm, are facing additional stressors, or could benefit from parenting support may also be interested in a referral to PCBH.

Wishing the team a safe and sunny summer,

Rebecca Craven and the VMG Pediatric Committee