

COMMENTARY

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Here's to making it a great summer ahead!

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As we get closer to the end of the school year, I start to think about the summer ahead and what it will be like for our young people. Many will have a summer job, some might pick up more responsibilities around the home - like looking after younger siblings - while others will be looking forward to the outdoor activities the summer brings.

Navigating some of the freedoms our teenagers seek over the summer break can be tricky, and may even cause a bit of family tension. It's not easy hearing, 'You're the only parent who says no!', or 'You're just so unfair!' (often with a few other choice words thrown into the mix).

Coming back to your family values and age-appropriate expectations - with the law as a helpful guide - can make these conversations easier. These discussions often touch on staying out later, alcohol use, and other potentially risky situations.

Local community organisation Path Wānaka connects parents, whānau and caregivers to the tools, knowledge and skills necessary to support young people through their teenage years.

Path's 'Safe Summer in Wānaka' information can be found on their website:

pathwanaka.org.nz/parenting-with-purpose-hosting-with-care/ where you'll also find other valuable resources and support services for parents, whānau and young people.

Tips for parents and whānau

- **Know who your teenager is spending time with** and where they plan to be.
- **Connect with other parents** if your teen is staying overnight elsewhere.
- **Create a safe exit plan.** Agree on a code word your child can text if they need an excuse to leave a situation that feels uncomfortable. You can then call and 'need' to pick them up - a simple way for your teen to exit safely while maintaining their mana.

There are so many ways to make the most of the incredible environment we live in. Spending time with the young people in our lives can be as simple as a walk down the Outlet Track, a visit to a pump track, or cooking and gardening together - small moments that build skills and connection.

With a bit of planning and by staying connected, we can make sure this summer is safe, positive, and enjoyable for everyone.