



Mott Poll Report

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Traveling with Teens: Independence Day?

When families go on vacation, many parents hope to spend meaningful, quality time as a family, while teens may want space to do their own thing. Finding the right balance can be a challenge. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 13-18 years about their experiences taking vacation with their teen.

Most parents (81%) have taken a vacation or overnight trip with their teen in the past two years. Among these parents, 32% say they insist their teen interact with family members when on vacation; 64% prefer it but don't force the issue, and 4% don't care one way or the other.

One in 5 parents (19%) say they have never allowed their teen to be away from them while on a vacation, higher for teens 13-15 years (24%) vs 16-18 years (12%). For parents reporting their teen has had independent time on vacation, many indicate they set rules to keep their teen safe, including having the teen check in by phone (64%), and asking them to stay with friends or siblings (62%), and stay in agreed-upon locations (55%). Over half of parents (59%) report using the tracking feature on their teen's cell phone when they are away from parents.

In describing how they would handle common vacation scenarios, less than half of parents (46%) say they would be very likely to let their teen stay in the hotel room while parents/siblings go to the hotel breakfast, while 29% would very likely let their teen stay at the hotel when parents go out to dinner. One-third (31%) would be very likely to let their teen walk a short distance to a coffee shop, and 21% very likely to let their teen split off from parents at a museum or amusement park. In all scenarios, parents are more likely to allow independent activity for older vs younger teens.

Two-thirds of parents (64%) are very confident their teen would abide by their rules if allowed to spend time without parents while on a vacation or trip. Still, half of parents (51%) worry about an accident or injury, with no difference by teen age or sex. Parents of girls worry more than parents of boys about their teen being approached by a stranger (70% vs 41%) or getting scared (37% vs 21%), while parents of boys worry more than parents of girls about their teen doing something dumb (47% vs 36%).

Leaving teens alone on vacation

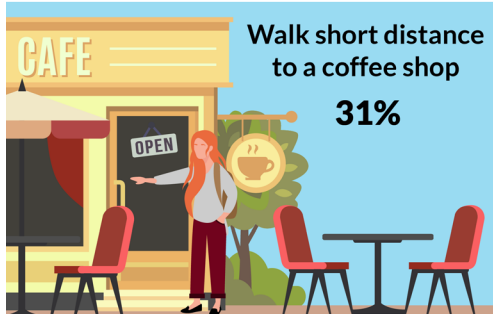
% of parents very likely to allow independent activity in the following scenarios

Stay in hotel room while parents/siblings...

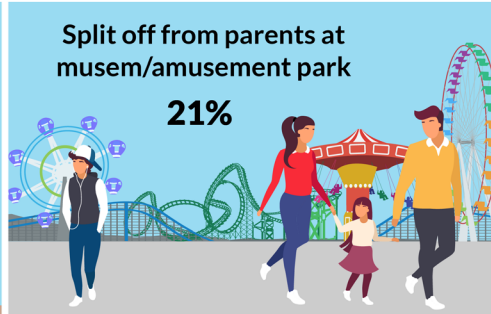
...go to the
hotel breakfast
46%



...go out
to dinner
29%



Walk short distance
to a coffee shop
31%



Split off from parents at
museum/amusement park
21%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2025

Report Highlights

1 in 5 parents say they have never allowed their teen to be away from them during a vacation or trip.

2 in 3 parents are very confident their teen would follow their rules if allowed to spend time without parents while on vacation.

1 in 3 parents insist their teen interact with family members while on vacation.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2025 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,021). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 67% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,047 parents with at least one child age 13-18. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 5 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

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Implications

As children become teenagers, their desire for more independence is a natural part of growing up. Time away from parents, especially in new settings like vacations or family trips, can be an important step in helping teens build the confidence, decision-making, and self-management skills they'll need as adults.

For parents, however, this can be a challenging transition. Results from this Mott Poll show that many parents may be holding back on letting their teens explore this kind of independence. One in five parents reported that they have never allowed their teen to be away from them while on a family trip or vacation. Parents may believe they are shielding their teens from possible harm, but being overprotective limits teens' ability to develop important life skills such as navigating unfamiliar situations, assessing risk, making decisions, or simply building confidence in their own abilities.

Involving teens in vacation planning can provide an opportunity for parents and teens to set expectations around teen independent activity. Allowing teens to have input may prompt them to be more engaged during the vacation.

Parents endorsed a variety of concerns about their teen spending time away from them while on vacation, including some that reflect gender stereotypes for girls and boys. However, these worries need not prevent parents from supporting independence. Instead, they can serve as motivation to prepare teens to be on their own in age-appropriate ways. For example, rather than worry about their teen having an accident or injury, parents can enroll them in a first aid course online or through a community organization. If parents feel their teen might be scared to stay alone in a hotel room for a short time, they might go over basic safety guidelines about locking the doors and responding to a knock from housekeeping.

When on vacation, parents will want to consider the surroundings and talk with their teen about practical strategies to balance freedom and safety. For example, before allowing a teen to go to a nearby coffee shop, parents might ask teens to think about the best route, easily spotted landmarks, and how they will pay. They can also agree on a time to return and how to contact parents if plans change. Cell phones are a common way for parents to stay in touch with teens. Asking for a simple check-in text when the teen arrives at their destination can ease parents' worries and allow teens to demonstrate their success. However, texts and calls shouldn't be so frequent that they interfere with the teen's opportunity to figure out how to navigate and make decisions. In some cases, such as crowded or unfamiliar areas like amusement parks or cities, using the tracking feature can add another layer of reassurance; it's important to discuss this in advance so both teens and parents understand it's meant for safety, not surveillance.

For parents who believe their teen is not ready to be on their own for even a brief amount of time, it is essential to find opportunities for teens to take ownership of their interactions and personal safety when they are with parents. This will build skills and help them learn how to navigate unfamiliar situations.

Helping teens gain independence is a gradual process; as teens progress, vacations can be an ideal testing ground. If done thoughtfully, these moments away from direct parental supervision allow teens to practice responsibility and decision-making in a relatively safe environment, while still knowing support is nearby if needed.