

NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER PLANS

Spring is in the air--or will be soon. This means, it's time to plan for the long, hot summer!

Your parenting challenge is to: 1) Balance your children's structured and unstructured time. 2) Encourage them to continue learning even though school is out. 3) Foster their increasing personal growth and responsibility. 4) Ensure their safety and well-being.

BALANCE STRUCTURED/UNSTRUCTURED TIME

When I look back on my summers as a child, what I liked was having enough time for big projects, reading for hours out on the porch, being in charge of the house while my artist mother painted, and daydreaming on a swing my father built for me in an old apple tree. My summers were balanced.

Most children--although few will admit it on the last day of school--look forward to school in the fall. Three months is simply too long a chunk of unstructured time for almost all children.

Children need both structure and freedom from structure during summer vacation. Why unstructured time? First of all, children need time to play. All mammals, including children, need both solitary play and play with peers in order to prepare for adult life.

Children also need time to do nothing. They need to daydream, think about the world, and watch the clouds go by.

Children are not good planners--planning and time-competency skills must be taught. And too much unstructured time can lead to a near-terminal case of boredom.

Your children need YOUR HELP to balance the summer and ensure proper amounts of both kinds of time. Activities you and your children plan together depend on the child's age, personality, likes and dislikes, skills, and the availability of resources in the community.

SUMMER LEARNING

Just as adults should be lifelong learners, children should be year-round learners. Don't let your kids assume that they can disengage their brains and waste 25% of the year just because school's out.

- o Schedule a part of the summer for academic work. Summer academic work falls into three categories: remedial, review, and enrichment. If the teacher has assigned work over the summer, help the child set up a schedule to complete the assignment before school starts--no last minute scrambling! If the child has passed everything but is weak in an academic area, set up your own family summer school. 30 minutes a week in spelling or fractions can be a big help. And, of course, it won't hurt the A students to review some basics before school starts.

- o Look for enrichment courses in languages or computers at a public or private school.

- o Start a summer reading program for the whole family. Include a family reading hour when each person reads aloud as well as a reward for reading a certain number of books.

- o Sign your child up for classes in subjects like drama or dance offered by community organizations, or instruction in sports like swimming or tennis.

- o Private lessons in music or tennis enrich the child in two ways. They provide individual instruction and they require practice time which adds to the structure of the child's day.

- o Day camp, sports camp, or play school provide the child with instruction in sports or crafts as well as group experience.

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

Enhance your children's opportunity for personal growth by providing new challenges and experiences. Summer is the perfect time to help children become more responsible for themselves and to others.

- o Show your child how to set up a schedule for the summer and go over it with the child every week.

- o Give each child extra summer chores. When school's out children have more time to do house or yard work. Just as children gain in height over the summer, so should they grow in responsibility. Try to help each child learn new ways to act and feel responsible. For example, older children can prepare meals for the entire family.

- o Buy your child a diary to write in every day. This is an activity children do by themselves and for themselves without parental involvement.

- o Encourage or suggest projects that require planning. My children loved putting on plays or neighborhood circuses using the local pets. Gardening is a long-term activity. Summer is also a good time to start or improve collections or hobbies like building models. Be sure your child has a good place to work and store the necessary paraphernalia.

- o Involve older children in volunteer work like walking an elderly neighbor's dog or cleaning up that neighbor's yard.

Plan ahead. Start thinking now about what summer activities you should sign your child up for. Work out the dates for the family vacation well in advance so you know what weeks your child will be free. Leave a few days open for one day mini-vacations the entire family can enjoy--a hike or a picnic at a nearby state park or a mystery trip.

SUMMER HEALTH AND SAFETY

Obey all WATER SAFETY RULES: always assign a "designated watcher" who is doing nothing but watching the children in the pool or at the beach--not grilling chicken or talking to friends. Never leave a child alone near any body of water (pool, wading pool, bathtub, bucket) even for a minute--a child can drown in the time it takes to answer the telephone. Never rely on floaties or other inflatable toys. Learn CPR just in case.

Protect your child's skin from the SUN. The deadliest form of skin cancer can result from a severe sunburn in childhood. Put sun screen on your children the way you would put mittens on them if you lived in Minnesota --automatically. Dress children in a tee shirt when they are swimming to protect the shoulders and use hats to protect the ears and face. Protect your children's eyes from the sun with a hat and sunglasses.

Don't forget basic child and home safety this summer: seat belts EVERY TIME; no riding in the back of a pickup truck; bicycle helmets; lock up all toxic substances, medicines, and guns; no fireworks--even sparklers can burn; no playing with matches, barbecue grills or campfires; no running near glass doors.

Be sure your children observe the look-both-ways-before-crossing-rule. Also make sure your children know their full name, address and phone number and know how to use 911.

Finally, PROTECT YOUR CHILD'S GROWING MIND FROM AN OVERDOSE OF SUMMER TV. Set up stringent summer TV rules which both limit the child's time in front of the TV set and forbid unwholesome programs.

Have a great summer!