

REDUCING STRESS DURING SUMMER VACATION

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Summer is finally here! Do you remember how exciting it was to end the school year and begin the long stretch of beautiful weather and carefree days? I still remember walking home with all my belongings stuffed in a gym bag on that last day of school and the feeling of release from responsibility that gave me a sense of freedom that I can feel to this day. I admit that I have little or no recollection of the stress that my parents must have felt as they considered what they were going to do with me for two and a half months! If they ever harbored any desire for revenge, I can assure them that their wishes were granted, as my wife and I parent our four children; and as much fun as summer is, it can be very stressful without our regular school-year routine.

During the summer, parents who work full-time scramble to find affordable camps and child-care, and parents with someone who stays home scramble to find ways to keep their children actively engaged and occupied. It can be a financial struggle for some, and a time management struggle for most. Routines change frequently, and down time can lead to complaining, too much screen time and sibling squabbles. It's no wonder why parents are so excited to see September roll around!

Here are some effective ways to help reduce the stress during summer vacation:

Involve the Kids

1. Involve kids in setting up routines for summer. They will be different, and sometimes they will change. However, cooperation will be much greater if children are involved in creating the routines and monitoring them to see if they're working.
2. If you're home with your children during the summer, try make time for alone time with each child. Play dates for siblings often provide an excellent opportunity to take a single child out for ice cream or a bike ride.
3. Summertime is a wonderful time for recreation, but it's also a wonderful time to learn to work as a family. Instead of everyone breaking up and doing chores individually, find some projects that the whole family can work on together. This way you can get your chores done, and spend quality time as a family. Only in the last 70 years have we had so much recreation time. Learning to work, and work together are essential life skills!
4. If your children are older, do chores when everyone is home. Parents often set themselves up for frustration by expecting that chores will be done when they are not home, or are busy with other activities.
5. Involve the children in setting limits on screen time. Decide as a family what is appropriate for everyone, and decide together what the limits will be. Remember, when children are involved in making decisions cooperation levels go up. When it's time for adult follow-through on pre-defined limits (involving children in creating limits doesn't mean they won't push the limits) simply ask, "What was our agreement on screen time?"

An Ounce of Prevention...

- Find out what your children want to do for camps. Sit down with them and discuss the options. Don't be afraid to do some budgeting with them. Let them know how much money is available, and the

amount of time that they need to be in camp because you're working, and figure out the camp schedule and choices together. This is a wonderful opportunity to build important decision making skills.

- For older children, don't forget about work! Going door to door to inquire about lawn mowing and yard work is a forgotten art form! Older neighbors are often thrilled at the opportunity to interact with children and help them learn the value of hard work and earning money. Most local employers today complain about the lack of teenagers who want to work summer jobs. It's never too early to save for college!
- Plan some summer fun for the family, together. What rituals can you set up as a family that are cost effective and take advantage of the weather?
- Use vacation time to “trade” time with friends. Watching each others children and planning fun activities in your area is a great way to save some money, have some time with the kids, and let them have time with their friends.
- Embrace downtime. The school-year can provide a nice structure, but can also be stressful. Children need downtime to think, create, rest and imagine. As a matter of fact, those passive activities are now being recognized as vital to healthy brain development.