

5 Strategies for a Successful Summer

Summer is just around the corner, promising busy families a more relaxed and enjoyable pace of life! But parents with school-aged children might have mixed feelings about entering the summer months. While you might look forward to fewer battles over homework and less rigid routines, you also might be concerned about the transition from the children's well-rehearsed school schedule to a new and very different kind of schedule.

Here are some ideas that will help ensure a smooth transition and make way for cherished summer memories:

1. Review summer schedules and make final adjustments.

Whether you made summer plans months ago, or you are still recouping from the holidays, this is a good time to sit down and review the calendar. Begin at the parental level. Have we communicated clearly about desired plans including children's activities, work schedules, childcare, and vacations? Does our use of time align with our values and priorities? Decide what additional steps are needed to secure your plans and act accordingly.

2. Prepare kids for the transition

Be sure your children know about the plans that affect their schedule, including who will be taking care

of them, summer programming, and vacation plans. While most children look forward to summer, they may still experience some anxiety with the thought of big changes in their routine. Help ease any possible butterflies in their stomachs by presenting the changes in a positive manner; by giving them a few healthy choices about their activities; and, when possible, offering to take them to new environments in advance so they may explore the area and meet new caretakers. You might also consider putting children's activities on their own calendars so they know what to anticipate each day.

3. Balance scheduled activities with unscheduled time.

While planned activities and programs can be enriching, many of the desired benefits can be lost when kids are too busy. Over-scheduled children can become stressed and over-reliant on constant external stimuli, suggest Alvin Rosenfeld, M.D. and Nicole Wise, authors of *The Over-Scheduled Child*. Remember that children also need plenty of down-time to relax, as well as unstructured play time for their own whims, like setting up a lemonade stand with friends, making up their own game of tag, or chasing the dog in the backyard. If your child is apt to sink hours of




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continued



unstructured time into T.V. or video games, set limits on those activities and encourage other healthy options. Free play, as Edward Hallowell, M.D., author of *The Childhood Roots to Adult Happiness* indicates, might be a child's greatest domain for joy, creativity and problem solving. Protect the open spaces in your children's schedules.

4. Maintain routines and behavioral expectations.

In the summer, it is natural and reasonable to relax the strict routines of the school year. Perhaps bedtimes and wake up times are more flexible. But don't throw out routines altogether. In addition to increasing the likelihood of a smooth transition back to school routines, children with routines in place will be well-rested, better-behaved, and maintain healthier habits.

Maintaining behavioral expectations is also important. It can be tempting to hold kids less accountable to rules in the summer in an effort to keep the peace or "let kids be kids." However, not remaining consistent can be problematic. Children get confused

about the limits and might push them too far, leading to unruly and unsafe behavior. Keeping the rules keeps the peace and allows everyone to have more fun.

5. Make time to be together.

Be deliberate about making and protecting family plans. Of all the things your children will remember in years to come, it may not be the programs you paid for or the play dates they were on, as much as the time you spent together as a family. Consider family cook outs, bike rides around the neighborhood, or volunteer activities.

When you are together, allow yourself to really be in the moment. It's easy to run your grocery lists and To-Dos through your head while you are spending time with the kids. But, remember that children are present-focused, and they can sense if you're not emotionally present. They'll be grown up before you know it, so let yourself enjoy them at this very age, in this very moment!

Have a fun and safe summer!