

Parenting Matters

Quarterly Newsletter

July 2007

For Colorado Parents

Bring Back the Lazy Days of Summer

It's summertime, school is out, and many families are at their wit's end about how to fill three months of their children's free time. Images of summertime are usually cast in a light of hot, lazy, relaxing days by a lake, but the reality for most working families is the struggle to balance the demand of adult work schedules with providing safe activities for the children. This dilemma often results in hectic, stress-filled days comparable to those during the school year. While summer camp is an option for some, the cost of day and overnight camps can be too expensive for many families' budgets. Structured activities are beneficial, but parents and caregivers should also keep in mind the advantages of unstructured time for children.

So what do we do to keep young children busy, yet also allow them to enjoy the summer months? Whether your child is a preschooler or school-age, a wealth of opportunities for fun, educational, and even relaxing activities are possible. Here are some tips that may be useful for families and caregivers:

Visit the Library

Until recently, libraries offered little or nothing for children below the age of three, but in the past few years, many have introduced programs for toddlers. Children and adults can participate in activities that may include reading aloud, storytelling, fingerplays, rhymes, and songs. Preschoolers usually enjoy the group activities offered by libraries, where they can participate in puppet shows and arts and crafts activities. For elementary school children there are variations of the read-alouds, storytelling hours, and summer reading programs.

Discover geography

What makes a place special? What are the physical characteristics of your home town? Take children for a walk around your neighborhood and look at what makes it unique. Point out how it is similar to other places you have been and how it is different. If you live near a park, a lake, a river, a stream or a creek, take your children there and spend time talking about its uses. Read stories about distant places, make a list of places you would like to visit, and look them up on a map.



View and create collections

Go to a children's museum to view hands-on exhibits or suggest that your children start a "collection" and build their own museum. They can collect natural materials, such as acorns and leaves from a local park or sea shells from the beach.

Nature's Best

Older children can learn about weather by using a map to look up the temperature of cities around the world and discovering how hot each gets in the summer. Watch cloud formations and imagine. Do the shapes look like horses, ducks or other animals?

At night children can, depending on their age, camp out in a tent in the back yard. Create a treasure map for children to find hidden treats in the yard. Read about your state bird and state flower, and if possible, bicycle ride to a nearby park to find them.

Use community resources

Watch for special events, such as free outdoor music festivals or concerts. Many communities host evening concerts in local parks-- pack a picnic dinner and enjoy time with your family. People are resources too-- collectors, painters, and backyard naturalists may live in your neighborhood, eager to share their knowledge with children.

Rainy day activities

Summertime often brings thunder clouds. On days when outdoor activities are not possible, you can share family history and photos with your children. Pull out the old videotapes of past family gatherings and events. Prepare an indoor picnic with your child or cook dinner together.

Whatever the activity, children can enjoy and appreciate the summer months in ways that are both educational and stress-reducing for all involved.

Article edited to fit this publication.
National Association for the Education of
Young Children
www.naeyc.org/ 800-424-2460

PARENTING MATTERS, PREVENTION WORKS

Not My Kid

Summer Friendships and the Increased Risk of Drug Use

During which months do more teens try marijuana for the first time?

- A. January and February
- B. April and May
- C. June and July
- D. September and October

The answer is C—June and July. There is a 40 percent increase in the number of youth who try marijuana for the first time during these 2 months compared to the rest of the year. Each day in June and July, an average of 6,300 youth try marijuana for the first time. Think of it like this—that's 700 baseball teams.

Why the Increase During the Summer Months?

There likely are several reasons:

- * Boredom. Many kids say they started smoking marijuana because they were bored.
- * Friends who use drugs. Children are more likely to experiment with drugs if their friends do. During summer, kids have more free time to hang out with friends and make new ones.
- * Too much unsupervised time. Having lots of time without adult supervision puts kids at risk for drug use.

Turn to page 4 to find out more



SUPER SUMMER SNACKS AND FUN!

By Janine Lynn www.mommysavers.com/kids-activities

Hurrah!! Summer holidays are here! Let's get on with the fun, with things you have around the house!

Frosty Fruit

Wash, dry, and freeze berries, cherries, or seedless grapes in a sealed container. Enjoy on a hot day.

Dripless Popsicles

Dissolve one 85 g package of Jell-o powder in 1 C. boiling water. Stir in 1 1/4 C. juice. Pour into moulds and freeze.

Sensational Slush

Fill a small yogurt container 2/3 full with juice or pop. Cap with lid and place in freezer for 1 1/2 hours. Then, mix with fork every 1/2 hour or so until to desired consistency.

Water-gun Target Shooting

Stand plastic bottles up on a wall, fence, box, or table, with ping pong balls or empty film vials set on top of each one. From behind a firing line 3 - 4 paces back, shoot water at targets.



Wonderful Wet-prints

Pour water into a cake or bread pan. Dip your bare feet or hands into water and make wet-prints on the sidewalk.

Splashy Sidewalk Painting

Use a large paint brush (or plant mister) to create pictures on the sidewalk using water mixed with a little paint powder, food coloring, or Kool-Aid powder.

Bubblemania

Mix together 2 C. warm water, 1/4 C. good quality dish soap (I.e. - Dawn), a little food coloring or paint/Kool-Aid powder, and 2 Tbsp. glycerine or corn syrup. Use straws, funnels, whisks, small cookie cutters, etc. to make bubbles and more bubbles.

Sandcast Footprint

Dampen, pat down, and smooth a small area of sand. Make a footprint in sand about 1/2" deep. Mix together 1 C. water and 2 1/4 C. plaster of Paris to thickness of a milkshake. Pour mixture to fill in footprint. Leave to dry for at least an hour. Record date and name on back.

Available in Spanish By Request

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 Christine B. Cerbana
 Editor: **Bridget S. Ohl**
 Questions or comments?
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PARENTING MATTERS, PREVENTION WORKS

TIPS FOR TALKING TO CHILDREN IN TRAUMA: INTERVENTIONS AT HOME FOR PRESCHOOL TO ADOLESCENCE

SOURCE: <http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma/index.aspx>

Children are just as affected as adults are by a disaster or traumatic event. Some may be affected even more, but no one realizes it. Without intending to, we, as parents, may send our children a message that it is not all right to talk about the experience. This may cause confusion, self-doubt, and feelings of helplessness for a child. Children need to hear that it is normal to feel frightened during and after a disaster or traumatic event. When you acknowledge and normalize these feelings for your children, it will help them make peace with their experience and move on.

Following exposure to a disaster or traumatic event, children are likely to show signs of stress. Signs include sadness and anxiety, outbursts and tantrums, aggressive behavior, a return to earlier behavior that was outgrown, stomachaches and headaches, and an ongoing desire to stay home from school or away from friends. These reactions are normal and usually do not last long. Whether your child is a preschooler, adolescent, or somewhere in between, you can help your child by following the suggestions below:

Preschooler

- Stick to regular family routines.
- Avoid unnecessary separations.
- Permit a child to sleep in the parents' room temporarily.
- Encourage expression of feelings and emotions through play, drawing, puppet shows, and story telling.
- Develop a safety plan for future incidents.

Elementary Age Children

- Provide extra attention and consideration.
- Set gentle but firm limits for acting out behavior.
- Encourage expression of thoughts and feelings through conversation and play.
- Rehearse safety measures for future incidents.
- Point out kind deeds and the ways in which people helped each other during the disaster or traumatic event.

Pre-adolescents and Adolescents

- Provide extra attention and consideration.
- Be there to listen to your children, but don't force them to talk about feelings and emotions.
- Encourage discussion of trauma experiences among peers.
- Urge participation in physical activities.
- Encourage resumption of regular activities.
- Rehearse family safety measures for future incidents.

It is important to remember that you do not have to "fix" how your child feels. Instead, focus on helping your child understand and deal with his or her experiences. Healing is an evolving state for most children, but some may need professional help.

If signs of stress do not subside after a few weeks, or if they get worse, consider consulting a mental health professional who has special training in working with children. In time and with help, your children will learn that life does go on.

Article edited to fit this publication.



ACTION PLAN TO INSURE HOME ALONE SAFETY FOR YOUR CHILD...

1. Make sure your child understands why you can't be present.
2. Encourage you child to express feelings and concerns.
3. Always provide a way your child can contact you, a close friend or relative in an emergency...or just to hear a caring voice.
4. Establish clear and specific home-alone rules and guidelines.
5. Review and practice with your child until he/she seems comfortable.
6. Be aware that there is a fine line between responsible self-care and neglect. From: The Bureau for At-Risk

Youth 1-800-99-YOUTH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

SOURCE:

WWW.FAMILY.SAMHSA.GOV/TEACH/

What Can Parents Do?

Monitor your teen’s time. This may be more of a challenge during the summer months than it is during the school year, but it is critical to keeping your child healthy. Changes in families and neighborhoods have increased the amount of time that many young people spend unsupervised. Even when you can’t be home to monitor your child, there are steps you can take to keep an eye on him. It’s time to get creative when it comes to keeping track of your kids.

* Team up. Is there a responsible adult in your neighborhood who is home during the day who can help monitor your child? Network with other adults in your community to help build a “safety net” for your child.

* Technology is your friend. Many teens are plugged into the latest gizmos and gadgets, so use that technology to monitor your child:

1. E-mail. If you have e-mail at work and at home, use it to swap notes with your child during the day.

2. Instant messaging (IM). For many teens, IM is a primary form of communication. You can get IM on your cell phone or computer and use it to chat with your child throughout the day.

3. Cell phones. A growing number of teens have cell phones, and if your teen is one of them, make sure she has it with her at all times.

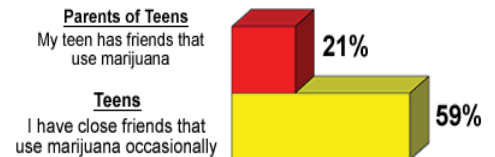
* Get to know your teen’s friends. They can be an important factor in your child’s decisions about alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. For more information, visit Summer Friendships and Increased Risk of Drug Use.

* Plan regular “check-in” times, but don’t rely solely on them. For example, you might tell your teenage son to call you when he wakes up and again right after lunch. But don’t let these be the only calls you have all day! Call him at home and check in at different times so he gets the message that you want to know where he is at all times.

* Find supervised activities in your community that your teen enjoys. Youth who are involved in constructive, supervised activities during non-school hours are less likely to use drugs. Talk with your child about what she would like to do during the summer and see if you can find a summer program in your community.

“Kids may equate summer with freedom, but for parents, it’s when they need to be even more involved in their teens’ lives. As soon as they pack up their locker for the year and step out of school, kids are much more likely to try marijuana,” said John P. Walters, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. “By keeping teens busy, knowing whom they’re with, and making sure they’re supervised, parents can help prevent their teen’s summer from going to pot.”

Not My Kid



* Quotes are representative of responses heard in qualitative research.

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Colorado State University
 Cooperative Extension
 135 Aylesworth Hall NW
 Fort Collins, CO 80523
 (800) 457-2736
 www.coopext.colostate.edu/CFERT



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