

STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUMMER BREAK

TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR CHILDREN'S DOWNTIME TO HELP MAKE IT RELAXING FOR EVERYONE

MAY 2016 RESOURCE SHARING

While all children do better with structure and routine, those with mental health issues are especially dependent on the predictable “safe zone” that school provides.

Here are ten tips to help keep your child on track so summer can be as fun and rewarding as possible for everyone in the family:

1. **Maintain your schedule**

While you may never be able to duplicate the structure school provides, it helps to maintain the school year's daily schedule, right down to meal times and bedtime, as much as possible. Children who thrive on predictability and are prone to panic over transitions benefit from posted schedules that outline what will happen throughout the day. Depending on your child's developmental level, simple pictures also help.

2. **Make plans**

Try to schedule as many activities as possible, as early as possible, and keep your children posted. This can mean everything from “we're going to Aunt Mary's Thursday at 5pm for dinner” to having a set routine that every day, weather permitting, you'll be going to the playground or pool.

3. **Get outdoors**

Try to find something your child enjoys—riding a bike or scooter, playing tag, or splashing at the community pool, water park, or beach—and do it. Plus, physical activity is good for everyone's mind, body and spirit, especially those children with energy to burn.

4. **Maintain—or create—a behavioral system**

Children and teens, especially, may act like they want to be in charge, but the truth is they feel safer knowing exactly what you expect of them and the rewards that result from good behavior. You should choose the two or three most desired positive behaviors to nurture with consistent and positive reinforcement, and try to ignore as many of the negative ones as possible. This teaches children the definite rewards of desired behavior, and that acting out gets them nothing—not even negative attention.

5. **Find support**

Parents of children with developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems often feel isolated and lonely. Spend times with friends; it'll help you keep from feeling marooned, and your well-being is critical to caring for your child.

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6. Mimic home routines, even when traveling

This could mean anything from eating meals in your hotel room rather than a restaurant to taking preferred objects along on the trip to keeping the same bedtime rituals.

7. Work with your child's strengths and interests

Find a community program geared toward your child's special interests. Keep a line of communication open with camp or program personnel so that any potential problem can be straightened out quickly.

8. Pinpoint your child's anxieties

Summer can bring camp, new activities, and different authority figures like new sitters, all of which can be stressful. First, you need to figure out your child's fears by asking open-ended questions rather than yes-or-no questions. Once you know, you can encourage her to face her fear. The goal is to teach her that feeling anxious in uncomfortable but anxiety will ebb if you push through it.

9. Give your child time to adjust

A technique called gradual exposure is a good way of relieving a child's anxiety about a new experience. For instance, if he has separation anxiety or social anxiety—he's worried that others won't like him or he'll embarrass himself in baseball—you might watch the entire first practice. The next time, you could stand further back or leave at an appointed time. Eventually, you'll be able to drop off your now-comfortable child. It can also be helpful to give those working with him a head's up. Your goal is to set your child up for success; that includes making sure all the adults are on the same page.

10. Prepare yourself for some tough times

Even with the best-laid plans, you may see some regression and worsening behavior over vacation. Give yourself a break and be ready to hold your ground in as calm, firm, and consistent a manner as possible. Yelling or becoming physical only escalates things, while giving in teaches your child that if he screams loud enough, he'll get what he wants.

Excerpted from "Strategies for a Successful Summer Break" by Beth Arky from <http://childmind.org/article/strategies-for-a-successful-summer-break/>