

Published May 13th, 2009

Ask Dr. Harold Prepping for Summer

By Dr. Harold Jules Hoyle, Ph.D.

I was out to dinner with my family at Yu Sushi in Orinda when I got to talking with a couple at the sushi bar who were on their date night from the kids. We began discussing the plans we would quickly have to make for our kids as the summer approaches.

In my experience, our kids often travel to two different lands during the summer. The first place our children find themselves in is the Land of Boredom. They live for the end of school and then are searching for things to do and "just hanging" - often translated into "just bored." The second most common summer venue for our kids is Schedule-Land. With play dates, sports and school camps, sleepovers and vacations, we need a Franklin planner to keep track of it all. Many parents I know cheer the arrival of September when school shows up to take their children for 7.25 hours a day. Parenting is hard enough without doing the exhausting the job of a full-time tour guide.

So here are some suggestions for this summer:

Build good habits.

Rest and entertainment are important parts of a balanced life, but they are not life's purpose. Responsibilities do not stop in the summer. Summer can be a great time to help children learn to do what they can do. Psychologists call this developmentally appropriate behavior. Just like you can think of a hundred activities to do while at work, when kids do their chores, they can decide what they want to do when they are done. Summer is also a good time to help kids learn to manage their time. An important point to remember is that the parent sets the developmentally appropriate boundaries. Set a bed time and some chores and even a reasonable wake up time. (I can hear my daughter screaming now.) Good habits are built all year long, not just during the nine months of school.

Do things that are easier to do in the summer.

Summer can be a time for trips, family time, being around your kids in new places and new ways, and dare I say, adventure. Find your favorite new sandwich shop or burrito place, get that food to go and explore your world. Have kids spend time with their friends. Social skills are much easier to work on during the summer. Have them journal about their activities. Research indicates that students who do more reading and writing that is not associated with school, do better on school-related reading and writing. Have them read and write about what they do and where they go.

Don't go backwards.

School has a funny design still based on farmers needing more labor help during the summer. This leaves us with 8-10 weeks away from school, which is a

long time - particularly if you are a child. Plan or find some activities that incorporate academic skills into summer fun activities. We recently had a baby quail show up on our lawn with no flock in sight. We had the kids research what it was, found out where to take it, and ended up at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum. When the kids got home, they made an illustrated book about "Flutter" and wrote the story in Spanish. So have the kids do some reading, writing, and mathematics that are grounded in the fun of summer. Have them think and reflect about things. Summer can be a time when kids don't lose everything they learned during the year.



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