

Summer Boundaries for Kids!



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It is summer and children are filled with enthusiasm and passion for adventure and wanting to try new experiences. Many parents struggle with how to keep their children healthy and happy during long summer days. Some families schedule many summertime activities and camps for their children. Others reinforce a more relaxed lifestyle with some special family planned activities and lots of free time for exploring. Some children are busy with sports activities while others spend endless hours playing online games and watching television. Summarized below are five considerations for family fun with a balance of structure and free play activities.

Keeping Balance in Daily Life

It is difficult to balance each child's daily schedule when planning camps, sports activities, and family play. Some children thrive with lots of scheduled activities while others are overwhelmed and need lots of free time to relax and decompress from daily life. When our kids are overscheduled or bored, they fight more and are more anxious about daily life. Identifying an appropriate balance of activities for each child's temperament and personality can be challenging for parents. Some helpful strategies include:

- Help each child identify 1 to 3 activities for summer play and make a plan to complete each activity.

- Adjust the daily schedule when activities are exhausting to allow time to relax and rest.

- Keep family life simple and relaxed during days of busy schedules.

Reinforcing Healthy Growth and Behaviors

During the summer parents can help their children develop healthy growth and behaviors by setting limits and consequences for positive behaviors and misbehaviors. For example, parents and their children can create a list of healthy behaviors that can be rewarded weekly with a special activity. Another list can be created for identifying misbehaviors that can result in timeouts or the loss of a daily privilege. For example, if a child acts aggressively towards his

siblings, he may lose his screen time privilege for a day. The consequences for positive and negative behaviors should be reinforced by both parents to be fully effective and rewarding.

Maintaining Adult Supervision with Daily Adventures

Summertime offers abundant opportunities for children to explore nature with their family. Although children will not be formally learning academic subjects, many family outings can include science discovery and historical site visits. Camping, hiking, picnics, beach days, and visiting local and national parks offer extraordinary opportunities for children to learn more about their communities. When older children venture out into their communities to meet up with friends, it is important to have them check in with parents and caregivers on a predetermined schedule to ensure they are O.K. It is important for parents and caregivers to be accountable to their children as they begin to explore their neighborhood and community. Parents and caregivers' responsible actions and availability can encourage children's healthy development and confident independence.

Managing Screen Time and Summer Learning Opportunities

Children need a healthy mix of outside play, exploration, and learning throughout the summer. Learning should be fun and can include learning new

hobbies, art projects, sports, academic subjects, and visiting family historical sites. These activities provide opportunities for reading and applying mathematical concepts. One child may create a vending machine mockup toy while another may create a masterful watercolor. Other children may spend their time practicing a sport, planning the family vacation, or learning how to cook a meal. Screen time can be educational but must be limited to ensure the children live balanced and engaging lives with their families and friends.

Honoring Sleep Schedules and Bedtimes

Many children's sleep schedules are very relaxed during the summer. Some kids will stay up most of the night playing on phones or laptops. It is important to set a healthy sleep schedule for all family members to ensure that all can function in a productive way throughout the day. The added benefit is that children are more rested to tolerate stress and conflicts with parents, siblings, and friends. Additionally, children are able to adjust easily to getting up early for the new school year in the next few weeks. For example, we have our children leave their electronics charging in the kitchen at night after we go to bed to ensure none of us are interrupted from a restful sleep.

May the last weeks of summer be filled with wonderful memories of new adventures, play, and loving relationships with family and friends.

