



Tips for Parents: Summer Activities

Early June means the end of the school year, and with it, a lot of kids without much to do. While many people imagine summer vacation being a bunch of lazy days, the fact is most parents have to work and worry about what they'll do to keep the kids busy and out of trouble.

Safety First

Childcare over the summer months can be an expense many families can't afford. But before you leave your kids home alone be sure that they're responsible and old enough to stay home safely. Check your state's laws about the youngest age a child can stay alone. Make sure they know what to do in an emergency, how to deal with strangers on the phone or at the door, and have a neighbor check in on them regularly.

Keep them Busy

While summer should be a relaxing, fun time for kids, they still need to keep their minds and bodies active. Set firm limits about how much time they're allowed to watch TV and movies, or play video or computer games. The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that more than two hours a day in front of the TV leads to increased obesity and lowered academic achievement.

Instead, provide the kids with a comprehensive list of approved activities, and make sure they have the supplies on hand to do them. Make it clear which activities they're allowed to do on their own, and which ones they need to do with adult supervision. Here are some ideas for learning, active, summer fun:

- Visit the local library for books, videos, music, games, activities, story times, and summer reading programs. For tips and ideas, visit the American Library Association at <http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/summerreading/summerreading.htm>
- Sports—have the kids join a team. If that's not possible, encourage them to play basketball, soccer, baseball, badminton, volley ball, or croquet in the yard or with friends that live nearby.
- Other outdoor fun: tree climbing, jumping rope, camping in the backyard, bike riding, sidewalk chalk, building forts out of cardboard boxes, playing with pets, swimming, jumping on a trampoline, or running through the sprinkler. Check out <http://fun.familyeducation.com/play/outdoor-activities/33394.html> for tons of great ideas for kids 6-10 years old.
- Projects: planting a vegetable or flower garden, writing a book or journal, painting a series of paintings on a theme, planning and performing a play, making a movie with a camcorder, etc.

- Learn a new sport or musical instrument, study geology or geography with field trips, or astronomy and stargazing.
- Arts and crafts activities. Visit <http://www.creativekidsathome.com/summerkidsactivities2.html> for fun ideas.
- Start a collection: bugs, rocks, dried plants or flowers, books, or found objects.
- Help them plan, advertise, and run a small summer business: babysitting, lawn mowing, pet sitting, selling baked goodies, crafts, or jewelry they've made, or have them start plants from seeds and sell them. Read these tips from Money Instructor <http://www.moneyinstructor.com/art/childbusiness.asp>
- Volunteer. Kids learn a lot from helping others. They can help an elderly neighbor, coach a younger team, be a teen volunteer at the local hospital, or organize a charity event such as car wash, barbecue, or mothers' luncheon. Teens can visit <http://www.dosomething.org/volunteer> for volunteer opportunities near them.
- Summer camp: have them go to an accredited camp for a week or two for a change of scenery and good fun. Visit the American Camp Association for accredited camps in your area. <http://www.acacamps.org/>
- Planned outings: visit the zoo, museum, planetarium, beach, park, swimming pool, go camping or hiking, stargazing, or fishing.
- Cooking: have them plan, shop, and prepare for a family dinner each week. They can visit the award winning kids cooking website, Spatulatta, at <http://www.spatulatta.com> for ideas, measuring instruction, safety tips, recipes, and more.
- Community Events: check your local paper or visit your library to find out about fairs, festivals, and other community events to do as a family.
- Board games: encourage them to make it exciting by having neighborhood chess tournaments, a Monopoly day (where everyone dresses as their favorite Monopoly game piece), or play for prizes.
- Chores. Ok, doing chores is rarely fun, but it's important for kids to take part in the family's chores. They learn responsibility, and feel proud that they can contribute. Require that kids clean up after themselves, and have them help out with laundry or watering the garden. Reward them for a job well done.

With a little bit of planning, summer can be a safe, fun, and learning time for kids.

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