



Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Need some more ideas for summer activities? Visit these sites for some wonderful options:

http://www.extension.org/pages/Wonderful_Low_Cost_Summer_Activities_for_Kids_and_Families

<http://familyfun.go.com/>

<http://www.kidsturncentral.com/summer/summerfun.htm>

http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.aspx?itemid=220

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Enjoying a Relaxed Summer

By Linda Jorgensen

Sitting around the house for 3 months is no way to spend a summer. Granted the economy is still not in the best of shape and travel for many families is problematic but that doesn't mean a summer spent at home has to be dull and dreary. A slower routine, taking time to enjoy the activities you are involved in and keeping things simple can make for a fun and relaxing season for the entire family.

The first week of summer break we make a conscious effort to slow down our routine. For starters we sit down with the family and discuss what we want to do for the summer. This is our family down time, our time to relax. We've all been working hard and with school out we're going to take a break from our usual hectic routine. We want a rest.

For the first week we sleep in. Then we start an abbreviated schedule for the rest of summer. No need to rush for a morning bus that isn't coming. Not only do we all get a little extra sleep this allows for nighttime activities we would otherwise lose sleep for. Movies at the city park after dark, flashlight games with neighborhood kids, star gazing parties, to name a few. Sleeping in lets us stay up late and have a little fun. We always work back into the school routine about three weeks before school starts. Until then, the only one who has an alarm set is Dad.

Next we discuss the amount of organized activities, camps, or sports the family participates in. Keeping practices and games to a minimum allows for spur of the moment family fun. We choose activities the kids REALLY enjoy and let the rest go. We make sure to post everything on a large calendar in the kitchen where everyone can see it.

Lastly we look at our weekly therapy and doctor appointment schedule. Like many families one of our children goes to weekly occupational, physical and speech therapy sessions. During the summer, **and with the permission of our physician and the therapists**, we scale back these visits to every other week. We've found a periodic short break can be beneficial both for our daughter and the rest of the family. We're able to return to our regular treatment schedule mentally refreshed and better able to "get to work".

Activities at Home

* Keep minds busy and engaged! Plan a weekly trip to your local library for summer programs and leisure reading. Let your kids choose books THEY want to read and not what's on their reading list. Children learning to read with a specific reading program are more likely to find books they

enjoy in larger variety at a local library. Be sure to set aside some time to read, once you get your selections home.

* Use the back yard! One of our favorite things to do is set up water games. A wading pool is great as even our daughter can sit in her wheelchair and still dangle her feet, as long as we remove her footplates for her. Water balloons, squirt guns and sprinklers to run through are great fun on a hot day.

* Haul out the camera and pick a theme for photos. Choose a category such as ABCs, numbers or colors, etc. Take pictures in your neighborhood of the appropriate topic. Set up a bird feeder and take pictures of the birds that come to visit. Take photos of various neighbors or community workers that come to your neighborhood (the postman, garbage man etc.) Take the photos and turn them into a book. The kids will enjoy looking at the photos while reinforcing basic knowledge.

* Play games! We enjoy finding new board games or outside games we can play with the neighbor children. Night games are a family favorite.

* Camp in the backyard. Set up a tent, haul out the sleeping bags, whip up dinner on the barbeque or fire pit if you have one and get ready with the campfire stories. Be sure to turn OFF the automatic sprinkler system, if you have one (We still haven't let Dad forget the year we all got "rained on" by the railbirds at four in the morning).

* Sign up as a family for classes at your local Community Recreation Center. Many communities have family summer programs designed specifically for families with activities for every age group.

Local Activities or Short Day Trips

We have a hard time traveling very far with our daughter and generally only plan a single, weeklong, "away" vacation per year. During the summer months day trips are a family favorite. We've learned to take several 4 day weekends over the summer which stretches out our family play time. By taking advantage of the activities being planned in surrounding communities we have great adventures without having to travel far from home. The best part about staying local is being able to sleep in our own beds at night and knowing exactly where the reliable, accessible, restrooms are.

Some of our family favorites are attending the local farmer's market, rodeos, nearby town days and the annual mountain man rendezvous at a local historic fort. We also enjoy fireworks displays almost every weekend, summer stock plays and can plan on some great entertainment at our local town park. Travel does not have to be far to be fun.

Don't know what's going on in your town or county? Contact your town or county tourism/recreation office, consult a map of your area or contact your state Tourism/Travel Council for destination and event listings in your town or area. The internet can offer excellent destination resources with specific details and contact information with addresses, directions and phone numbers. This information will be extremely useful if you have specific access needs such as wheelchair access. A little bit of research can go a long way in organizing and planning a great day's outing for your entire family will enjoy.

A Day Off

Over the years we have discovered that not every day needs to be scheduled or planned to the minute. We've learned to deliberately leave several days each month totally blank and unscheduled. These are days to be used however each family member sees fit. Being flexible with our schedules allows us time to enjoy more fun if the opportunity arises. After all, it's summer. Time to relax and have some fun!

