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Summer Survival Guide Suggested for Parents

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Spring has sprung in East Tennessee. The trees and flowers are blooming at almost the same rate that eyes are watering and noses are sniffing. Amidst all the beauty of the beautiful spring here in the foothills of the Smokies, many parents are awakening to the realization that just around the corner is the dream or for some the nightmare called summer vacation. When most parents think about summer, they are excited to spend more time with their kids and look forward to swimming, going on vacation, and having lots of family time. However, ideal summer fun with kids is not a reality for everyone and some approach the warmer months with apprehension wondering if they will be able to survive until school starts again.

During the summer months, most children are out of their normal routine causing them to tire easily, becoming irritable and bored. As a result, the chaos index for the whole family may dramatically escalate and kids may work themselves into a seemingly never ending cycle of bickering and complaining aimed at both siblings and parents. In today's hurried, media intensive world, many children have the expectation that they should be constantly entertained. In recent years, parents have relied on camps and multiple trips to amusement parks or other attractions to keep kids busy. But with the current economy, money does not go as far and parents are searching for ways to be creative in their efforts to prevent World War III from occurring on the home front this summer.

The following are some simple and easy ideas to improve your family time this summer:

- Even though bedtimes may be later during the summer, it is best if they are at the same time each night and remain consistent unless a special activity warrants an exception. This can leave children more rested and less cranky. Letting children stay up until they cannot keep their eyes open is not good for anyone including parents.
- Stay on a regular eating schedule by serving timely meals and snacks throughout the day. Hungry children are often not fun to be with. Try to keep salads, sandwiches, fresh fruits and vegetables on hand at all times. This makes it easy for children to have a snack and promotes healthy eating habits all year.
- Plan some family activities. Even if you are not taking a vacation, you can visit nearby attractions such as parks, museums or lakes. Rediscover your hometown. Check with

the local parks department, library, school district and any recreation organizations for summer activities that would interest your family.

- Give children chores. This helps develop a sense of responsibility and is important to being part of the family unit. Make a list of tasks that are the children's daily and weekly responsibilities. If possible, choose chores that the children enjoy doing, whether it is vacuuming, laundry, mowing, washing the car, or bathing the dog. Expect the chores to be done before fun activities.
- Be creative. Make a list of your favorite childhood games and teach them to your children. If your children have not learned "kick the can", "tag" or some other game you enjoyed, introduce them to games that do not require a HD TV, computer, or hand-held device.
- Remember to schedule some free time. Every member of your family needs a little relaxing alone time to explore and develop comfort entertaining themselves. Avoid filling every waking moment for your child, but provide them with both active and quiet opportunities.
- Encourage physical and active activities during the summer. Summer vacation time is the perfect opportunity for this. This may include swimming, hiking, walking or other unstructured pursuits as well as competitive sports.
- Give your children opportunities to read, engage in creative writing, and use their artistic or musical talents. Provide them with plenty of art supplies, writing materials and visits to the local library.
- Finally, give children chances to do what they truly enjoy. In the process, they will discover creative gifts that are more difficult to experience in the structured environment of the school year.

In the end there will still be times when chaos and bickering will surface and you may wish for the relief of a new school year. When those days arrive, perhaps you can find a friend or a grandparent for the children to visit that gives you needed respite and relief. In those peaceful moments, find a quiet place with a cold drink. Close your eyes and go back to a time before the internet, computers or video games. Travel to a time before the intrusion of smartphones, voicemail and email. Think back to the days of "hide and seek" at dusk or playing until the first...no the second...no the third street light came on. Go back to a time when parents stood on the porch and yelled (or whistled) for you to come home. Remember endless summer days seeing shapes in the clouds and hot summer nights with the windows open listening to the sound of crickets. Think of the lazy warm days when the hardest decision was whether to go to the pool or stay home running through the sprinkler all afternoon. Even if for only a brief period of time, recharge and refresh because the children will be home all too soon.