

# Recreation, or How the Ball Bounces

by Karen Sampson, MA

**YOU'VE FOLLOWED THE GOOD ADVICE FOR SUMMER.** You have a nice, large family calendar with everyone's events and routines clearly marked. You've researched children's activities and signed the kids up for summer sports, tennis, or swimming lessons and are looking forward to the couple of weeks when they will be at camp.

But what about family *recreation*? You know, the time spent together and not running between appointments, lessons and deadlines. And chasing the dog, who seems to have found an old can of blue paint.

Recreation is important for any person and in the life of a family. It is adaptable to family members' special needs—there are forms of recreational activities possible for *everyone*. Recreation is the opportunity to “re-create” ourselves, our relationships, and our lives off someone else's treadmill of activity. When AD/HD is thrown into the mix, the importance remains but a new sense of creativity is needed.

## Indoor family recreation

Recently, my niece had as a project for her Girl Scout troop to make a special canister with ideas for Family Fun Night. The girls in the troop brainstormed various games that could be played in a group—charades or family card games or the names of various board games—and they wrote these ideas on slips of paper. Adding a few small toys, such as yo-yos, card packs, and children's modeling clay, they put everything in the canister, decorated it and came home with simple instructions: When looking for something to do as a family, put your hand in and pull out an idea. As reported to me, this was a hit in her family.

Try to avoid video games and television and movies when thinking of recreation and go for things that engage one another. Cooking together as a family can be great recreation. It creates the chance to talk with one another, share family traditions and history and teaches good eating habits to kids. Plus, studies have found that families

who eat together benefit in many areas of their lives. Make a decision to let the kitchen become a wreck, let the dog lick up the spilled spaghetti sauce and share with your children the joy of cooking.

Coloring books are vastly underrated, in my view. We tend to think of them as something for small children. I have found, though, that teenagers and college students enjoy coloring as a social activity and often will talk with adults about what is happening in their lives if they have coloring books and crayons at hand. With that in mind, why not plan a family coloring afternoon or evening? Find the wackiest coloring books or ones that are based on popular movies or television shows—my college students were into cartoons about talking vegetables and a little girl with a backpack—and take the time to color a bit outside the lines. It may be one of the most unique ways to re-create with your family, no matter how old members are.

## Outdoor family recreation

My mom sent us outside “to blow the stink off” on a daily basis. While the science is still examining the possibility that time spent outside, exploring patches of nature, helps alleviate some of the affects of AD/HD, it has shown it to improve the physical health of children and adults.

Family recreation outside can include everything from camping—high-intensity tents to low-intensity trailers—to strolling down the street. Take time to go bike riding as a family and explore what's just a few blocks over. Roller- and in-line-skating are enjoyable for many people.

The summertime is great for playing

pick-up basketball in the driveway and pick-up softball in the backyard. Or, simply play catch together. Other possibilities are croquet, soccer, and whiffle-ball.

Families with older children might like to play old-fashioned hide-and-seek at dusk. The fading light is enough to see by but changes the world just enough to offer a spooky game.

Spend time at the pool, either your own or a community pool. This is an opportunity to meet other families, play and splash and practice social skills in a relaxed setting.

Going to the local zoo opens other family recreation possibilities. The world is filled with terrific animals and the zoo has many people waiting to talk to you and your family about them. Zoos are great walking places, offering plenty of low-impact exercise, along with small cafes for a quick snack.

Don't underestimate the backyard, rooftop, and patio party. But don't wait for a reason to have a party; have dinner outside. Watch the sun set and the stars come out. Growing up, we spent many summer evenings on the deck, playing card games—Go Fish and Spoons, mostly. Those were the evenings of true re-creation in our family. When dealing with AD/HD, sometimes you just need to see each other in a different way than you are used to.

Family recreation offers a chance to know one another in roles that differ from the daily “Have you done your homework?” “Where are my socks?” “Who painted the dog blue?” roles we normally fall into. Recreation provides the chance to create memories and bonds that sustain us when blue paw prints run through our lives. **A**