

For the Fridge

Tips for a Good Summer

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“Summertime” conjures images of carefree afternoons in the sun, creative backyard projects and iced tea shared on the porch. For families who have one or more children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), summertime can be stressful instead of exciting. It doesn’t have to be this way, and with some pre-planning and a bit of research, it can be a great time of the year. Here are some ideas to get you started on the right foot for the upcoming season.

Have a family meeting

Share with your children what you expect from them in terms of behavior and work around the home and hear from them what they would like to do with their vacation. Make a summer agreement or contract that all members of the family are happy with and can refer back to. Children and teenagers who have ownership in decisions more readily live up to expectations. Plus, when the boundaries are clearly defined there is a greater level of comfort for kids and teens.

Create a family calendar

Get a calendar with large squares for each day. Mark all upcoming holidays, fam-

ily events, vacations and appointments for the summer. Include daily schedules and weekly errands. Keep the calendar in the kitchen or another spot where all members of your family can easily check it throughout the day and add their own events and reminders. This way, when you are doing your daily and weekly planning, you have in one place the information you need to create an enjoyable day.

Find a summer camp

Summer camp is a time-honored tradition: a break for children and parents to explore who they are independently. There are many excellent summer camps—day and sleep-over—avail-

able, including camps geared especially for children and teens with AD/HD. The adventures and confidence a child gains at summer camp will last a lifetime.

Discuss medications

Some families will take a “medication vacation” during holidays and summer break. Discuss this idea with your child’s doctor first. While some children do well on such a break, others have the same difficulties during the summer that they experience during the school year. Remember, the goal of summertime is for it to be enjoyable.

Make childcare plans

If both parents work, make childcare plans before the end of the school year. Schedule some time for children to visit a childcare center, spend time at a sitter’s or invite a sitter over on a Saturday afternoon. This helps children know what to expect. Plus, they will meet playmates while allowing you to observe how well they will do in the new situation. Treat the visit as a positive experience and children will look forward to it.

Build a routine

Routines create a sense of security and alleviate worry for a child with AD/HD – and his or her parents! When you’re discussing summer expectations, take time to build a daily routine that

works for your family. What time of the morning should family members be awake? When will the family have meals? What tasks or errands need to be accomplished in the morning? What activities will family members participate in during the afternoon? What time do the kids need to be home and have their pajamas on in the evening? Use timers on watches and alarm clocks to remind family members when to switch to the next activity during the day.

Pick enjoyable activities

Summer is a great time to get outside! Many children and adults with AD/HD report that their symptoms decrease and their ability to attend increases with physical exercise. Select a sport you can enjoy as a family or sign your child up for a team. If team sports don’t work well, encourage your child to engage in other physical activity.

Enjoy time as a family

Children who spend time each day with their parents as a family tend to have better grades, be less inclined toward risky behavior, and develop stronger relationship with parents and siblings. Take time each day to enjoy your children and family: share a meal, play board games, go for walks or work on a puzzle. Time spent together now will have great benefits for all in the future. ■