SUMMER *Management*

BY PAULA L. NOVASH

School's out, and students are looking forward to sunny, lazy days with free time to lie in the hammock or splash in the pool. But for parents who are dealing with their children's AD/HD, summertime can be challenging. Without the imposed routine of the school year, there is lots of time to fill. And when kids are bored and squabbling, those extra hours of daylight can seem endless. How can families develop summer plans to maximize warm-weather fun and minimize conflicts and behavior issues?

Anticipating areas that may be sources of stress, such as lack of structure, will help, says Terry Illes, Ph.D., is a school psychologist who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of AD/HD.

"Summer should be a vacation from school but not a vacation from life," says Illes. "Relinquishing all routine is a prescription for disaster."

"The schedule can be different, and it can be flexible," he continues. "But if parents have established boundaries and kids know what to expect, they will be less likely to push limits."

Maintaining a routine

The daily schedule can include elements such as waking time and bedtime, chores, scheduled activities such as camps and classes, and free time. Parents should make sure children have time for active play and exercise. And they may also want to consider "screen time" guidelines for use of electronic products like the computer, television, iPod, and Blackberry.

Parent Liz Tibett says her family plans their summer together. "We make a family summer schedule in writing and allow our children to have input," she explains. "There has to be a balance between free time and constructive activity time."

Using a schedule helps avoid summer pitfalls like not eating regularly or sleeping enough, Tibett points out. "It's important to watch your AD/HD child's diet. Without a schedule eating times seem to be sporadic, and who doesn't get cranky when they are hungry?" Tibett asks. Typical summer fast foods create dietary imbalance. Further, the medications taken by many

explains. Eisenhart says she thinks of her summer routine as a "schedule of fun, not a schedule of obligation. Summer is a time of exploration and creativity."

Activities for summer fun

From a neighborhood play group to a trip to the science museum, parents can find abundant offerings for kids of all ages.

Mom Cristie Gibbons says her children have explored a wide range of programs in her community. "The kids participated in a yoga class last summer, a class on electricity, and one on dissecting animals," she says. "One camp includes a bus ride out to a school that owns horses and

people with AD/HD may interfere with appetite at mealtimes, but result in a voracious rebound when a meal is not available. "Plus it is important to adhere to a reasonable bed time. Lack of sleep aggravates behavior and increases attention span deficits," Tibett adds.

Many parents include some sort of academic time in the schedule but make it fun. Reading books on topics kids are especially interested in, but may not have time for during the school year, is a good idea. Regular visits to the library give children the idea that reading is part of life. Some libraries have summer programs especially designed for children.

"We try to read together at least every other night to keep the 'school work' activities in place. Otherwise it's close to impossible to set kids on track when September comes around," says Tibett.

Mom Catherine Eisenhart says early morning swim lessons have worked well for her family. "It's especially important to have an activity scheduled early. That gets the day off and started so you don't lose structure," she

Summer Activities for Kids

- Day camps
- Play dates (teachers may be able to recommend compatible children)
- Crafts, such as scrapbooking, collecting, etc.
- Sports programs, especially in noncompetitive leagues where everyone participates
- Visits to parks
- Nature walks
- Reading aloud
- Art projects and classes
- Bike rides
- Science programs
- Day trips to a children's museum, zoo, or aquarium
- Children's theater programs or performances
- Volunteering individually or as a family
- Board and card games
- Interactive computer or video games
- Gyms and exercise classes
- Community college classes
- Dance programs
- Secondary school summer programs like auto shop, carpentry, or cosmetology
- IMAX movies
- Visiting an observatory or airport

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boats so the kids could have a 'traditional' camp experience. Another is at the local art museum, where they participate in art projects."

Camp opportunities are also available for kids whose AD/HD needs to be managed in particular ways. Mom Virtryece Louis Michel's son attended a specialized camp at a university. "His day was planned to the minute. It included practicing social skills like being a good friend, self-defense, and how to handle teasing," Michel says. "He had specific measurable goals for behaviors, too, and I received daily progress reports and parent training."

As children grow, they may pursue more independent, yet still structured, summer activities. Cheryl Monroe's 14-year-old son has branched out from local camps to sleep-over ones.

"At skate camp my son has been in a dorm environment and has had the great gift of caring for himself under supervision. Some of the things I glean from the week kill me (like what he does or doesn't eat), but I have seen the advantage of his being responsible for himself," says Monroe. "This has been huge for him because we tend to 'run' his life to keep it moving. It also enabled him to go on a school trip to Greece this summer without me. He's very proud of himself."

Look for bonding opportunities

Many families find that the relaxed summer routine gives them more time to interact in positive ways. Cristie Gibbons values family dinners, which can be more relaxed without homework looming. "We have a lot to discuss at night since the kids are involved in so many things," she says.

Catherine Eisenhart's family has regular movie nights. "My four children take turns picking the movies, and we write whose turn it is on the calendar so there's no room for argument," she says. Eisenhart will also ask grandparents to babysit so that she can take her older son and daughter to the pool after her younger two are in bed.

Liz Tibett shares, "I allow my kids to pick a

night-time activity based on good behavior, such as 'ice cream time' at their favorite shop. That, too, can become a summer routine."

Keeping track of the kids

One challenge of summer is that children may go off in many different directions. Parents may feel stressed at not knowing exactly who is playing where and with whom. As children have more freedom to move about the neighborhood, Illes suggests setting up regular check-in times. For instance, a younger child may wear a watch with an alarm, and when it rings he or she is expected to call or come home. Teenagers can carry cell phones.

Recharging for parents

Psychotherapist Sari Solden, author of *Women With Attention Deficit Disorder,* says that a summer schedule is not just for children. "Anchors are replenishing for you, the parent, as well," she says.

Solden also suggests that parents share child and family care duties. "Make sure you are not the only energy source in the house," she continues. "Seek help from grandparents and partners. Hire a neighborhood high-school or college student who can drive, or trade off child care with other parents so you can maintain space for yourself."

Most of all, Solden suggests being realistic about expectations. "Try to not be over- or under-structured," she says. "Waking up without any plans is challenging, but don't plan every moment, or you're probably setting yourself up for disappointment."

Reconnecting as a family

"Be careful not to make summer all about the things you and your child haven't kept up with during the school year," cautions Illes.

"The routine of school can be especially grinding for children with AD/HD," he continues. "These children need some concentrated downtime to refresh their energies and renew their enthusiasm. Use the summer to reconnect and enjoy each other." ■

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