



Focus on Families First

Hooray for Summer?

By, Robin Nelson



Parents and caregivers of children struggling with emotional and/or behavioral issues are not necessarily singing their joy from the rooftops over the fact that school is out for three months. Sure, the kids are ecstatic and the educators can't wait for the time off. But what about you?

Yep, kids love summer. They love the time off to "relax". They love the *idea* of the unstructured time that awaits them. They love the warm weather and the thought of sleeping in or going on summer adventures. How do parents and caregivers feel? Some parents really look forward to a summer filled with fun with their children. Other parents, though, just don't know what to do...

I am a parent of three grown children. When my children were growing up, my husband and I decided that it would be best if I stayed home with the kids. I loved it. I always understood that it was a luxury. In summer, I loved being able to just get up and go wherever we felt like going. I loved hanging out with my kids. I thought they were fun. They played together for hours and hours. Sometimes I would stand by and watch them play. They were so funny. When they went off to school I would miss them.

I loved it, that is, until they got a little older. Then it became more and more difficult. They became competitive with each other. They would argue and tease one another constantly and they always tried putting me in the middle. They always wanted me to take sides. It was so hard for me because I never wanted to be the "bad guy".



I remember one day when my two sons were ganging up on my daughter. They were all calling me, "Mom! Mom!" I was in my room folding

laundry. First I closed the door. That didn't really help, because then they started knocking on my door, "Mom! They won't leave me alone!" Mom! Would you tell her to stop!?" It's hard to describe the level of complaining, actually. It was going on for what seemed like hours, over and over until I started to cry. I wanted to just go under my bed and hide for the rest of the summer. How was I supposed to put up with this for two more months?

I tried all the things that any parent will try. I tried speaking to them calmly about MY feelings. I tried to explain to them about how much nicer life was when they got along with each other. I tried giving them the silent treatment. I tried yelling. I tried sending them to their rooms. I tried taking things away...

As any parent can imagine, nothing worked. I started to dread summer. I even started to dread weekends.

Although years later I discovered that one of my children was struggling with mental health issues, during this time (pre-teen years) I was unaware of any such issues. As far as I was concerned I had "typical" children.

After many conversations with many parents, I realize that their behavior *was* pretty typical. So what about the parents and caregivers of children with serious emotional/behavioral issues? How on earth do these parents cope?



Some children can go outside to play and blow off steam. Other children, though, cannot be left unsupervised.

So, what do you do? Well, the first thing should be PLAN!! If you have a child or children that have behaviors that are unsafe, create a safety plan, before anything else. A safety plan will help you to be able to predict behaviors before they happen, have a list of prevention techniques on hand (so you don't have to think in the middle of a crisis) and have a plan that will put some of the responsibility and power in the hands of the person in crisis. Families First has a great safety planning template that we would happily give to you, explain to you or even help you to use.

Aside from safety planning, remember that kids with issues of behavior, anxiety or depression may also have some real trouble with unstructured time. Because of this, planning as much of their time as possible will be a valuable tool for keeping things in your lives under control.

In strengths-based planning, along with families we look at their strengths, assess their needs then use those strengths to meet their needs. This is a good philosophy for life, really. When you're thinking about what to do with your high-needs children, first look at what they're interested in and what they're good at. Consider things that will keep them occupied and also think about giving them lots of variety, when planning activities at home.

Another thing you may consider is giving your children and yourself time away from each other. Is there some sort of summer youth activity in your community that has the proper structure for your children? Do you have any supports in your community, like friends or family that will be willing to give you and your children some time apart? Is daycare an option, maybe even part-time? How about sleep-away camp or a visit with a relative that lives somewhere else?

If your children are old enough, you should absolutely include them in the planning. Not only will this help to relieve some of their possible stress, but it will give them a sense of ownership over the plans.

So, here is a step-by-step guide of how to create a family summer plan:

Set aside a few hours for the planning process, preferably on one day or evening. Have a conversation with your children beforehand about people who may be part of the plan. Maybe they would like to spend Wednesdays with Grandmother or visit with a certain friend one day per week. If you are going to have a plan that includes other people, it's pretty important to include them in the process.

So, on the day of the plan get some big flip chart paper or some other big thing you can write on, if possible. The nice thing about having something big to write on is that everyone can see what you are doing at the same time.

On top of the first page you should write the words "Strengths, Interests, and Resources". On this page you and your planning group should brainstorm

about these things. Maybe one of your family's strengths is that you belong to a church. This strength can also be a resource. Maybe someone at the church owns a horse farm and one of your children has a strong interest in horses...

During this brainstorming session you really want to get as many things listed as possible. These will become the solutions to your needs.

After you have this list completed (well, it's never really complete, because you can add to it and/or change it at any time) you should start assessing your family's needs. Write "Needs" on top of another sheet of paper. Maybe your youngest child has a very short attention span and needs to have activities rotated every 15 minutes. How can you consistently make this happen? It must be part of your plan. If you can plan for it, it's possible. You may want to

categorize your needs list if you have several different types of needs. For example, perhaps you have at-home planning needs and away-from-home planning needs. Put them in separate lists so you can make separate plans for them.

After you have all of your needs listed then it's time for the group to look at that list of strengths, etc. and start coming up with plans. Write "Plan" on top of the third sheet of paper. Start matching the strengths, interests and resources to the needs.

That's how you create the plan. Look at those needs and see who or what can fulfill them. It would be wise to have a calendar to fill in as a visual aid for children who suffer from anxiety. A large part of anxiety is fear of the unknown. The more predictable you can make the summer, the easier it will be for your anxious children and the easier it will be for you.

So, although parents of special needs children may be dreading the upcoming summer vacation, take some time to think about what your family is going to do. Think about including as much structure as possible and plan, plan, plan. It may turn out to be a very successful time where you and your family can actually get along with each other, have some fun and maybe even create some memories that will last a lifetime.

If you are interested in creating a plan but feel that you need some help, contact Families First. Our family support specialists will be happy to help you.

Have a happy, safe and well-planned summer!!



Summertime Boredom Busters

From: <http://www.texashomeeducators.com/summerboredombusters.htm>

1. Paint a mural on a wall
2. Decorate bed sheets with fabric paint
3. Make hats (and pants! and shoes!) from aluminum foil
4. Make stilts from empty coffee cans
5. Stay home and play with water guns
6. Make candles
7. Juggle eggs
8. Take a bath in blue food coloring
9. Make paper
10. Paint hieroglyphs on your basement walls
11. Sing opera
12. Make a kite
13. Build a volcano
14. Build a baking soda rocket
15. Make people out of marshmallows, raisins and toothpicks, then squash them
16. See how many things you can stack on a cracker and still get it into your mouth
17. Paint a "stained glass" window
18. Carve polar bears out of Ivory soap
19. Make a wind sock
20. Build a book shelf
21. Record different sounds around the house and see if the other person can guess what they are when played back
22. Draw chalk outlines of yourselves on the sidewalk
23. Build an igloo out of sugar cubes
24. Make ceiling art - hang an outfit from the ceiling with thumb tacks as if a body is floating up there
25. Tie streamers on the ceiling fan
26. Cut out shoe prints (or paw prints, or ants, or spiders) and stick them to walls and across the ceiling
27. Paint faces on fruits and vegetables
28. Plan (in drawings) a silly menu for dinner
29. Find a sibling and play a board game
30. Kick the soccer ball/shoot some hoops
31. Make a tent out of sheets in the living room and eat snacks under it
32. Dress up and pretend
33. Play drama games
34. Make tea and muffins, invite others to join you
35. Set table and light candles
36. Cut flowers make a bouquet
37. Make creations using play dough or modeling clay
38. Use binoculars to watch birds
39. Cut paper and glue it
40. Use "how to draw" books from the library
41. Draw with sidewalk chalk
42. Go online and play a game on the Internet
43. Pop popcorn; watch a movie
44. Make Popsicles
45. Read a book
46. Memorize a poem
47. Write a poem
48. Choreograph a dance in the living room
49. Make a scrapbook
50. Make origami
51. Make and hang Chinese lanterns from a string across the kitchen
52. Bake cookies
53. Write a letter or email
54. Rearrange your bedroom furniture
55. Plant seeds or flowers
56. Write your own story and illustrate it
57. Clean out your bedroom
58. Sit in a tree and whistle or just daydream
59. Take a walk with a bottle of water
60. Create a cozy hiding place (blankets, pillow) and bring your headphones/CD player to it
61. Sit quietly while reading, listening or snoozing
62. Go play with the dog
63. Snuggle in bed with kittens
64. Play outside on your bike
65. Make up a song to sing to anyone who will listen including the animals
66. Eat
67. Organize a treasure hunt
68. Help mother
69. Help father
70. Make ice cream in a bag From: <http://crafts.kaboose.com/ice-cream-in-a-bag.html>

Ice Cream in a Bag

What you'll need:

- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 cup milk or half & half
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 6 tablespoons rock salt
- 1 pint-size plastic food storage bag (e.g., Ziploc)
- 1 gallon-size plastic food storage bag
- Ice cubes

How to make it:

1. Fill the large bag half full of ice, and add the rock salt. Seal the bag.
2. Put milk, vanilla, and sugar into the small bag, and seal it.
3. Place the small bag inside the large one, and seal it again carefully.
4. Shake, shake, shake until the mixture is ice cream, which takes about 5 minutes.
5. Wipe off the top of the small bag, then open it carefully. Enjoy!

Tips

A 1/2 cup milk will make about 1 scoop of ice cream, so double the recipe if you want more. But don't increase the proportions more than that—a large amount might be too big for kids to pick-up because the ice itself is heavy.



Autism Spectrum Disorders

What Everyone Needs to Know

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are ...

... a group of pervasive developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. People with ASDs handle information in their brains differently than other people. The term “autism spectrum” means that these disorders affect each person to different degrees. The symptoms can range from very mild to severe, and the ability of individuals with ASDs to think and learn can range from gifted to severely challenged. The severity and expression of the symptoms can differ among individuals.

... an urgent public health concern. Incidence of ASDs among the US population has increased tremendously in the last decade. Currently, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that an average of one in every 110 children in the United States has an ASD – that’s higher than the rate of childhood cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined. More people than ever before are being diagnosed with an ASD. While greater awareness and a broader definition of ASDs may contribute to this increase in diagnoses, studies indicate a true increase in the number of people with an ASD cannot be ruled out.

ASDs develop before the age of three, but are sometimes not apparent until later. They remain throughout a person’s life. To date there is no known cure for ASDs, although early intervention treatment has been shown to greatly improve a child’s development. Some ASDs can be diagnosed as early as 18 months of age, however, many children do not receive a final diagnosis until much older. Delaying diagnosis means a child may miss the opportunity to get help early.

Many people with an ASD require supports and services to develop the skills they need to live successful, happy lives. Recent studies have estimated that the lifetime cost to care for one individual with an ASD is approximately \$3.2 million. Average medical expenditures for individuals with ASDs have been found to be 4.1 to 6.2 percent higher than that of individuals without an ASD. The challenges involved in caring for a family member diagnosed with an ASD can be stressful for parents, siblings and caregivers and have widespread repercussions.

ASD Signs and Symptoms

There is no medical test to detect ASDs. Doctors must look at a person’s behavior and development to make the diagnosis. A person with an ASD might:

- Not respond to their name by 12 months
- Not point at objects to show interest by 14 months
- Not play “pretend” games (e.g. pretend to feed a doll) by 18 months

- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding others' feelings
- Have delayed speech and language skills
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- Get upset by minor changes
- Have obsessive interests
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel
- Repeat actions over and over again
- Lose skills they once had (e.g. stop saying words they were using)
- Have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions

What can you do?

If someone you know shows signs of ASD, don't wait. There are things you can do:

- If it's your own child, talk with your child's doctor. Ask for a referral to a developmental pediatrician, a child neurologist, or a child psychologist or psychiatrist who can evaluate your child.
- If it is someone else's child, share the signs of ASDs with the child's caregivers and encourage them to have the child evaluated.
- If the child is under age three, contact the New York State Early Intervention Program and request an evaluation: (518) 473-7016.
- If the child is between ages 3-22, contact your local public school district and request an evaluation.

For More Information

For information about ASDs and New York State supports and services for individuals of any age with ASDs, visit New York State's Initiative for Adults and Children on the Autism Spectrum (www.nyacts.com).

For help finding out who to speak to in your local area, contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (1-800-695-0285 or www.nichcy.org).

For more information about child development and the warning signs of ASDs, access the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Detect Autism Tools" (<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/DetectAutismTools/>) and its "Learn the Signs. Act Early" campaign (1-800-CDC-INFO or www.cdc.gov/actearly).

**Autism Spectrum Disorders are increasing.
Acting early can make a real difference.**



Warning Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Does anyone you know show these signs?

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by a problem with the brain. They are increasingly common, and are now estimated to affect one in every 110 American children. It is important to identify and diagnose ASDs and obtain intervention services as early as possible.

A child or adult with an ASD might:

- Not respond to their name by 12 months
- Not point at objects to show interest by 14 months
- Not play “pretend” games (e.g. pretend to feed a doll) by 18 months
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding others’ feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Have delayed speech and language skills
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- Get upset by minor changes
- Have obsessive interests
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel
- Repeat actions over and over again
- Lose skills they once had (e.g. stop saying words)
- Have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions

People showing signs of ASDs should be evaluated.

To find out who to speak to in your area, call the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities 1-800-695-0285.

Visit NYacts at www.nyacts.com to learn more about supports and services in New York State.

Quick Contacts for New York State’s Autism Supports & Services

For services for a young child (birth to 2 years):

NYS Department of Health, Bureau of Early Intervention
(518) 473-7016

http://www.nyhealth.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/index.htm

For educational services for children ages 3 to 21:

The appropriate local school district

NYS Education Department, Special Education
(518) 402-3353

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/>

For services for a student planning for adulthood (age 16-21):

NYS Education Department, Special Education
518-473-2878

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/transition/>

NYS Education Department, Independent Living Services
(518) 474-2925

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/lsn/ilc/brochure.htm>

NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities also provides support for transition activities (See below).

For services for individuals ages 3 to adult:

NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities

Voice: 1-866-94NYSDD (1-866-946-9733)

TTY: 1-86 NYDD4TTY (1-866-933-4889)

http://www.omr.state.ny.us/autism/hp_autism_asd.jsp

For services to help prepare an adult for employment:

NYS Education Department, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

1-800-222-JOBS(5627)

http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/adult_vocational_rehabilitation_services/home.html

For services for someone with a serious mental illness:

NYS Office of Mental Health

1-800-597-8481

<http://www.omh.state.ny.us/>

For advice, assistance or advocacy:

NYS Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities

1-800-624-4143 (Voice/TTY/Spanish)

<http://www.cqcapd.state.ny.us/>

For assistance responding to denials of insurance coverage:

NYS Insurance Department, Consumer Services Bureau
(800) 342-3736

<http://www.ins.state.ny.us/consindx.htm>



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Strengths Based



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Open

Monday 8:30 am—7:30 pm

Tuesday—Friday 8:30 am—4:30 pm

Food Shelf &

Kids' Clothing Exchange

Mon, Wed, Fri 9 a.m.— Noon

(special arrangements may be made for other times by appointment)

NOTE: Food Shelf and Clothing Exchange will be closed on days that STAFF MEETINGS are held

FTAdk: Families Together in the Adirondacks
FTNYS: Families Together in New York State
PCANY: Prevent Child Abuse New York
FSG: Family Support Group
YE: Youth Empowerment
Rec Group: Recreation Group
LEICC: Local Early Intervention Coordinating Council
TBA: To be announced

- All activities will take place at Families First and children must be accompanied by adults unless otherwise noted.
- Activities are subject to change and may be closed, leaving them available only to families receiving higher level services (HCBS Waiver, ICM and Family Support).