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SCHOOL'S OUT...
now
what?



Your kids need to strike a balance between chilling out and staying engaged this summer. But what can you do to help them find this balance—and keep yourself sane in the process?

ENGAGING KIDS' MINDS WITHOUT LOSING YOURS

by Lisa A. Beach

With the academic clock winding down for the school year, you're now faced with two to three months of potentially lazy summer days stretching before your tweens, teens and home-for-the-summer college kids. This poses several sticky situations for parents: Should you let your kids sleep in or wake them up? Should you make them "be productive" or let them just chill out? Should you have the same expectations for tweens, teens and home-for-the-summer college kids?

STRIKE A BALANCE

Once you and your kids agree to a reasonable wake time in the summer, then what? Before your kids start binge-watching movies on Netflix and engaging in text-a-thons with their friends, set up some ground rules on the expectations you've got for their free time. Whether you put a limit on screen time or adopt a "work-first, play-later" mentality (to ensure they take care of their chores and responsibilities), make sure everyone's on the same page about how summer will play out.

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LET'S START WITH SLEEP

According to the National Sleep Foundation, teens need to get about 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night to function best. But, since they're probably staying up later on summer nights, their normal routines are off-kilter. Even though it might rattle parents to watch summer mornings slip away while teens snooze until noon (or later), should parents let them sleep in a bit?

"It's best for teens to have a consistent sleep schedule during the summer," according to Lisa J. Meltzer, Ph.D., CBSM, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at National Jewish Health and a National Sleep Foundation Education Scholar. "For many teens, that will mean staying up late and sleeping in late. However, some teens have a summer job or summer school, which may prevent them from sleeping in too late."

So what's a sleepy teen to do? Meltzer advises keeping to a consistent sleep schedule as much as possible. For example, if teens need to wake by 8:00 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, then on the other days they should sleep no later than 9:00 a.m.

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- Dr. Lisa J. Meltzer, National Jewish Health



MIDDLE SCHOOL KIDS

As parents, you can help bridge the gap between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next without imposing a “summer school” mentality.

For starters, look into summer programs, day camps and enrichment opportunities that kids can explore, advises Rob Lundien, a spokesperson for the American School Counselor Association, which supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career and social/emotional development.

In addition to structured programs, try some of these ideas to keep your middle schoolers engaged this summer:

- **Work on life skills.** In just a few more years, your kids will be heading off to college. Will they know how to cook a meal, wash their clothes, clean the toilet, vacuum and budget their money? These all take lots of practice, so why not let your kids bone up on life skills this summer? Teach them what they don't know how to do (like a load of laundry), then ask them to practice this skill regularly (like changing and washing their bed sheets every weekend). Age-appropriate skills they can tackle now include babysitting, menu planning, cooking, making minor household repairs, doing the laundry, gardening and saving money toward a short-term goal (like purchasing a new app for their phone).



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- **Read.** Take a trip to your local library and give your kids free reign to pick out books that pique their interest. Then ask them to read a set amount each day, such as one chapter, 10 pages or 15 minutes. If they're reluctant, you could make reading a prerequisite for earning screen time. But the key is to let them pick books they want to read.

- **Foster a hobby.** Do you have a budding photographer, inventor, computer programmer, interior designer, chef, musician or woodworker? Get the resources your kids need to pursue their passions. Borrow books from the library, invest in some basic equipment, sign them up for a specialty summer camp or watch YouTube tutorials together. Summer offers a perfect time to explore hobbies and pursue passions.

- **Tackle a fun project.** Maybe your kids have been begging to update the look of their bedrooms now that they're almost teenagers. Let them say good-bye to their little-kid themed rooms and plan out a fresh update. They can pick out new paint colors, help refurbish a piece of furniture, learn how to recover a throw pillow or play around with digital photo-editing tools to create a poster-sized collage to print and hang. Besides getting a bedroom-makeover, kids get hands-on opportunities to learn how to paint a room, sew a fabric pillow cover, sand down furniture or use photo-editing software.

See Page 59 for GLF's Suggested Summer Reading.

HIGH SCHOOL TEENS

High school kids have four summers to prepare themselves for life after graduation. While they might look at summers like their “last hurrah” before adulthood, perhaps they shouldn’t spend their days parked in front of their video game console or hanging out with friends all the time.

How can high schoolers make the most of their summers?

“Families might want to connect first with their students’ school counselors in the spring to see what summer opportunities and resources have crossed their desks,” Lundien points out. For example, he receives information on programs, such as job fairs, summer internships and SAT-prep courses.



In addition to programs offered by local schools and communities, high schoolers can try some of these ideas:

- **Get a job.** Working, even on a part-time basis, racks up the skills your teens will need in their future careers. Besides putting extra cash in your teens’ pockets, part-time jobs can teach them responsibility, accountability to someone besides mom and dad, a good work ethic, time management, teamwork, assertiveness, interpersonal communication and a host of other life skills. Plus, when it comes time to ask someone to write a letter of recommendation for a college application or scholarship, they’ve already got a built-in reference.

- **Volunteer.** Doing good not only feels good, but it also helps teens get outside of themselves. At a time when they’re often

wrapped up in their own teen angst, looking at their community from the perspective of “How can I help?” shifts teens’ mindsets and helps them see the bigger picture. Volunteering also offers a great way to start networking, which could open the door for career exploration, job shadowing and part-time jobs. Many colleges and scholarship committees look for well-rounded teens who serve their community, so volunteering will help them stand out when they’re ready to apply.

Plus, volunteering can serve as a great eye-opener for students in terms of where their passion lies. In fact, sometimes it’s a quick way to gauge whether or not they want to continue down a certain career path.

“I’ve had students who have volunteered in a local hospital and realized very quickly after seeing some of the things that go on that it wasn’t for them,” cites Lundien. “And it was good that they found it out now before they went off to college.”

- **Prepare for college.** Although the last thing teens might want to think about during the summer is preparing for high-stakes testing or writing a college scholarship essay, summer might actually be the best time to tackle these time-consuming tasks. During the school year, students manage quite a heavy schedule between classes, homework, club meetings, sports practice, volunteering, part-time jobs and other after-school activities.

“By taking a summer test prep course or working on scholarship applications in July and August, students can lighten the workload they face during the pressure-filled school year, according to Varun Tewari, owner of Victory Step Test Prep.

Tewari suggests 40 to 50 total hours of test prep to maximize test scores. He points out that summer—without school studies and extracurricular activities getting in the way—is by far the best time to study for these tests.

- **Visit colleges.** With time for extended trips, summer offers up a great opportunity to visit college campuses as a family. Let your middle schoolers tag along as their older siblings

check out a potential college.

“I’ve even spoken to several families who started going on college visits when their kids were still in middle school, just getting them on a college campus, maybe tagging along as their older siblings checked out a college,” Lundien points out. “High school flies by so quickly, and juniors and seniors feel so pressured with SAT or ACT tests while they’re busy during the school year. Any of the ‘homework’ that families can do early on will take off a lot of that pressure down the road when the student is a senior.”

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- Varun Tewari, Victory Step Test Prep

HOME-FOR-THE-SUMMER COLLEGE STUDENTS

After spending even one semester away at college, your kids will find it a bit of a struggle to come back home and follow your rules like when they were younger. Plus, even though they're now in college, your kids might still need you to light a productivity fire under them during summer break. How can you strike a good balance between honoring their newfound independence, motivating them to keep moving forward and asking them to abide by your family rules?

- **Adjust expectations—yours and theirs.** Whether it's cooking a meal when you're pressed for time, running a few errands while you're at work or giving their younger siblings a ride, ask your college-age kids to help out while they're at home. Just because they don't pay rent and don't live there full-time anymore doesn't mean they can't earn their keep when they do come home. On the flip side, they're not little kids anymore, so you can't impose all of the same rules you used to. Have frank discussions with your young adults about curfews, bringing home a significant other to spend the night, drinking and other age-appropriate scenarios to avoid any surprises.

- **Start a business.** By now, many college-age kids have had summer jobs, but they were probably more of the retail/fast-food variety. This time around, see if they can make their own mark in the business world through an entrepreneurial venture. Perhaps they're majoring in marketing at college. Could they pair up with a local bar to help them better promote a summer music series or help a restaurant better market their mom-and-pop eatery? If they're studying web design, could they use their digital skills to help a local business revamp its outdated website?

- **Line up an internship or job shadowing experience.** Your young adults need to ask themselves what they can do to get their foot in the door of the working world. Summertime provides the perfect space for this to happen.

“Any time that students can get an internship or job shadowing opportunity, even if it's a volunteer position at a hospital, this will set them

apart from someone else who did nothing. It gives them proven experience within a company or organization,” says Lundien, who points out that this is equally true for both high schoolers and college students. “I always ask kids, ‘What are you going to do to set yourself apart from someone else? Academically, you might be on an even playing field with other students, but what did you do differently?’”

Straight from the parenting trenches: Becky Martin of Carrollton says her 19-year-old college student finds the balance by holding a job, taking online classes and doing some travel. “The job can be anything from babysitting, retail, restaurant or whatever. She took online classes last summer and will again this summer. While curfew for her is different than it was in high school, the reality is her father and I work, so she has to be quiet and respect the time we have to get up.”

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- Rob Lundien, spokesperson for the American School Counselor Association



FAMILY TIME

Regardless of who's home or the ages of your kids, you still need to build in time for some family fun. What can you do to forge those family connections, make memories and enjoy the slower pace of summer together?

- **Get outside.** Summer ushers in the perfect opportunity to build more outdoor activity into your lives. During the week, create a new tradition of after-dinner family walks, bike rides or late-night swims. On the weekend, head to the ocean, lake or river for the day to swim, canoe, fish or go boating or jet-skiing.

“Go for a family hike in a state park. Sign up for a local charity walk. Join a cycling club in your community, or train for your first 5K race together.

- **Take on a fitness challenge together.** Go for a family hike in a state park. Sign up for a local charity walk. Join a cycling club in your community. Train for your first 5K race together. Find ways to get fit in a fun way as a family, keeping in mind various ages and fitness levels. Visit www.GoodLifeFamilyMag.com for a calendar of events.

- **Vacation together.** Trying to get everyone's schedule to mesh is often a challenge, but if you can, go on an adventure together, whether it's a day trip, a long weekend road trip or a week-long vacation. Travelling exposes kids to different cultures and lifestyles and provides an incredibly rich learning opportunity in a fun way. Plus, experiencing it together creates those wonderful family memories that will connect your family for years to come.

AND FINALLY...

Keep in mind that many of these suggestions overlap for different age groups, especially the high school and college-age kids. But implementing even a few of these ideas will keep your kids engaged this summer, giving them the balance they need and the peace of mind you need.

See page 64 for some cheaper summer getaway tips, or contact travel expert Wendy Sandridge at travelmomwendy.com for some great ideas.

