



Building Stronger Families Through Summertime Fun

A COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF WAS HEARD around Hillsborough County between June 2-4, the last days of school. During the school year, families can feel fragmented as their different members become involved with outside responsibilities. When family members do come together, it's often like ships passing in the night – a brief wave and greeting are offered as they head off to some other activity. After months of school demands and conflicting extracurricular schedules, many parents welcome summer break as a way to reconnect with their children and families.

Summertime is a natural antidote to the school year's busy-ness. In Florida, the availability of so many wonderful outdoor settings and the summer's extra daylight hours offer a wonderful opportunity for early evening activities. These family activities do not have to be complicated, expensive or elaborate. Even very simple ones will provide many positive family memories and help families reconnect. Most importantly, the activities form and

strengthen protective family bonds that children need as they grow and become more independent. Research consistently shows that children who come from families with strong connectedness are able to withstand the pressures of adolescence more resiliently.



Although jobs and other adult responsibilities continue throughout the summer, there are many ways that parents can take advantage of the extra family hours. Often parents find that family dinners are easier to plan, schedule and carry out in the summer. Having this family dinner time has consistently

been associated with positive child and adolescent mental health. Other inexpensive activities can include bicycle rides, early evening walks along our community's trails and sidewalks, a quick visit to the pool or a fun game of tennis.

In addition, summer can be a time when children connect with their friends in a more relaxed manner. Playdates allow young children to interact and practice appropriate social and friendship

skills. This playtime is important because it's only through repeated interactions that children learn positive social skills. For example, children learn to take turns by doing simple things like a friendly cannonball competition at the pool. Pre-teen children practice negotiation skills while figuring out which summertime movie they are going to see. Meaningful relationships with positive friends are another protective factor that children and teenagers need to help with positive self-esteem. Summer is a great time to encourage them.

When adults think about their own childhoods, the memories that most frequently come to mind involve holidays or summertime fun. It is, of course, at these times we felt most connected to our own family and friends. This summer is the perfect opportunity to strengthen connections and form memories your kids will also treasure when they're parents.

So kick back, relax and enjoy your family!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Aranda is a licensed psychologist (#PY5983) who specializes in psychological assessments and child and adolescent therapy. More information about her can be found at www.helpingtampafamilies.com.

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