



*Sedgwick County...
working for you*

May 2011

Make Time in the Summertime

April showers and May flowers are the signal for children that summer break is approaching. Children begin to dream of all the wonderful opportunities summer brings. In stark contrast, parents begin to dread the constant stream of siblings fighting, repeated complaints of boredom, and the fears that the school year will not arrive soon enough to save their sanity. Fortunately, there is something that parents can do can lessen their fears and ensure that everyone's summer will go more smoothly. The key to summer success often surrounds having a schedule and predictable routines.

Throughout the school year, children are accustomed to structured schedules. By and large, children know when they are going to get up to go to school, what time they have to be at school, when lunch and recess are scheduled, and what time they leave. Most families have evening routines around dinner times, leisure time, and bedtimes. However, when summer break arrives there is a tendency to allow these routines to lapse and allow children to set their own schedules. It is common to see sleep schedules disrupted, activities occurring on a whim rather than with a plan, and mealtimes becoming chaotic. When schedules become unpredictable, children's behaviors can become more problematic, and consequently parents become frustrated.

Children are frequently not able to verbalize their need for structure and predictability but their poor behavior when a schedule is lacking is an indicator of its importance. Having a predictable schedule allows children to feel secure and safe in their environment. Lack of predictable routines can produce anxiety, as children become unsure of when and how their needs will be met. Children may be calling out to adults for help by using misbehaviors such as tantrums in attempt to meet their needs for security. Most parents can attest that children commonly misbehave when they are tired, hungry, or bored. Those misbehaviors can be diminished through adequate scheduling. Providing a schedule assists children and parents by establishing clear expectations and may decrease power struggles over time. Start developing your summer routine early and focus your efforts around the common child misbehaviors listed earlier; being tired, being hungry, and boredom.

Knowing your child and their current school schedule is important while developing your summer schedule. It is not necessary to mirror your child's school schedule. However, it is helpful to have the information for planning and to have an understanding of what your child is accustomed to during the day.

- First, understand how much sleep your child needs each day. The amount of sleep varies from child to child and across developmental stages. You may experience increased behavioral outbursts if your child is too tired and they may not be able to be successful during the day. The tendency during the summer months is to allow the child to choose when they go to bed and when they awake in the morning. For children who need to be up in the mornings, this can lead to irritability and conflicts. For others, a parent may find their children sleeping until noon the next day. When the school year starts, these parents may experience an increase in power struggles over bedtimes as the child or adolescents sleep cycle has become quite different than the one needed for school schedules.
- Ask your child's school when snacks times are during their scheduled day. Hungry children usually equal unhappy children and frustrated adults. Children need to eat more frequently than adults do. Try to include a healthy mid-morning snack and a mid-afternoon snack in your schedule. Having a set mealtime and snack schedule may help maintain your child's mood and decrease the meltdowns from children due to being hungry.



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Find out when the school usually has recess or physical activity and for what length of time each activity occurs. Understanding the typical amount of physical activity your child receives will help you in planning for the same amount over the summer months. It is important that your child has adequate physical outlets on a regular basis and does not spend the summer focused on television and electronic games.

- Look for opportunities for your child to socialize with peers. Children need time to play and develop social skills with others. However, make sure that there is proper adult supervision for the activities.
- Lastly, make sure that your child is not overscheduled or that the schedule is too rigid. Children need “down time” to relax too. Involve your child in the development of their daily schedule by giving them choices when appropriate.

In conclusion, by taking a little time now to develop a plan for summer, it can be a fun and enjoyable time for the whole family. Be mindful of sleep schedules, maintaining basic daily routines, and predictable mealtimes. By creating a plan to meet your child’s needs and sticking to a routine, transitioning back to school in the fall will also be much less stressful for the child and you. Take time now so that there are great memories later!

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