

Are you choosing the right summer activities for your child?

With summer vacation fast approaching, what to do for your kids becomes an issue. How do you choose the right programs or activities? Sometimes it's clear and your child knows just what he wants. Often it just isn't.

When choosing summer activities, there are some important considerations to keep in mind:

- 1) Remember this is for your child, not you. Be careful not to project what you loved as a kid, what you wish you had gotten to do, or what you want your child to experience. This is not about you.
- 2) Do not sign your child up for something you think she will like and then inform her. That's a sure way to cause disconnect in your relationship.
- 3) You can certainly make suggestions but keep them suggestions only.
- 4) Go over general categories—day or sleep away camp, sports programs, theater programs, horse camps, art or music programs, etc. Make sure whatever is offered is within your financial budget before your child gets enthused.
- 5) Find out what friends are doing.
- 6) Narrow categories and include your child (if old enough) in doing some research into local availability. The more your child is involved, the more engaged she will be and the less you will be blamed if it doesn't work out.

Many children have changes of heart at the last minute and questions arise about teaching commitment. What do you do when payments have been made? This is not limited to summer activities. Many children will be happy about choices of programs, even beg for them, but when the time arrives, they dig in their heels and refuse to go. Others start off with dug in heels but with gentle or not-so-gentle prodding find that once involved they love it. What to do?

This is normal and shouldn't be cause for worry that your child will never be able to make decisions or commitments. Knowing your child well is the best guide but even then many parents are left in a quandary. You may always walk the fence with this child, never knowing how far to push or when to back off. As long as you stay close to the fence, you won't be too far off. Trial and error is often your best guide. After a

situation does not work out, talk about it with your child. Don't let it slide, glad that it's over. Never blame him for saying one thing and doing another. Discuss with him what might have been a different way of evaluating the program and what has been learned for future planning. Get your child in the habit of looking back, learning from experience, and moving forward with new self-knowledge.

In the process of deciding on summer activities, voluntary school field trips, after school activities, and you're not sure whether your child's enthusiasm or lack of it will stick, play the "what if" game. "What do you think you would feel like if...? When it comes time to do...what do you guess that might be like? What would you do if...happened?" Be careful not to steer your questions or tone to lead him in the direction you want.

If you've decided that your kids have had enough structure and you choose to give them a welcome stay-at-home break, you may come up against the "I'm bored" syndrome. Your best intentions will appear to backfire. Resist the temptation to yell, "I'm not your camp counselor. You should be glad you're not in school and happy to be doing whatever you want. Now leave me alone!" Generally "I'm bored" doesn't mean, *I'm ungrateful, and I hate being here*. More likely it means *I don't know what to do or I want you to do something with me*. Even when we're happy, these moments happen. Children are so used to their parents fixing their problems (a habit to get out of), they say, "I'm bored" with all confidence that you will quickly solve the problem. Don't fall into this trap. Let your child know that you get bored sometimes, and that you're sure he will think of something soon. It's his problem, not yours. Sometime when you and your child are in a good place, make a list together of all the things he likes to do around home. Then post it so when you get the inevitable, "I'm bored", you can simply point to the list. If nothing on the list appeals at the moment, chances are your child needs to be bored for a while. Let him experience boredom.

The general rule of thumb is to engage your child in every one of his life decisions starting with "Do you want me to speak to your teacher about that?" Never second-guess what you're children will want. Ask their opinions and encourage negotiating to make it work for all—not just you or just your child. There is nothing wrong with a good argument from your child. It doesn't mean disrespect; it means your child feels comfortable arguing with you. That's a good thing. Then you will get her in the habit of

thinking carefully about the choices she makes so she learns that she is in control of what she chooses and what she doesn't. What better opportunity to learn such an important life skill than right now when making summer plans?