

SUMMER PLANS FOR YOUR TWEENS AND TEENS

**“IT TAKES A
VILLAGE TO RAISE
A CHILD.”**
AFRICAN PROVERB

As school winds down, the summer comes rapidly upon us. For many parents, the question of what to do with your young tween or teen who tells you he or she just hopes “to relax” all summer and “do whatever I want” becomes a bit of a conundrum. Yes, relaxation after a busy school year is not a bad goal but two and half months of unstructured time at home, perhaps in isolation, if you are working outside the home, is not such a great idea. Facebook, YouTube, video games and virtual friendships are likely to be the driving source of entertainment. Summer is a rich opportunity for learning, skill building and developing real, face to face relationships outside the classroom.

I encourage parents to put together a plan with their teen or tween. Ask the following questions:

1. If you could do anything, what would you most like to explore this summer that maybe you didn't have time to do while you were in school?

2. Highlight a special talent you saw your child begin to develop and ask about it. “You seemed to have so much fun doing _____ . I wonder if you would like to do something more with that?”

3. Capitalize on relationships that are healthy for your child. Suggest spending time with these people, especially if you can combine these relationships to include some form of adult contact. E.g. going to camp or on a mission trip with a friend.

The next step involves building a village for your child. In former times, children were mentored and guided by a strong network of caring adults. Each child had multiple aunts, uncles, older cousins and neighbors who guided a young one. With families spread across the country and so many adults working outside the home, many families may have to consciously create a network of mentorship for their tween or teen.

Ideas to consider:

1. Old fashioned summer camp. Your teen, who may be too old to attend, could volunteer to be a counselor in training. This could lead to paid employment later on.

2. Special interest experiences and specialty camps: art lessons,

drama camp, music and dance instruction, sports camps, Driver's Education, cooking classes, robotics and computer camps. Many of the specialty camps are held on college campuses. This gives your teen an exposure to a university and its programs. Try something new!

3. Job shadowing. Send your child to work with someone who is doing what he or she might like to do.

4. Entrepreneurship: babysitting, lawn mowing, pet sitting, and garden care are wonderful ways to earn money. Help your tween or teen make fliers to advertise his or her services.

5. Mission trips and volunteer experiences: “service learning” is the buzz phrase for this at the college level. These types of trips can be life changing for your child.

6. Finally, family vacations: this is your village. Embedding your child in his or her own kinship system via family camping, an

extended stay with cousins, older step sibs or a trip with grandparents can solidify your child's sense of identity, security and belonging.

Set your expectations for an amount of activity level that is appropriate for your child. Start your discussion with your tween or teen now. This conversation is likely to be more successful if it is viewed as a dialogue that may unfold over several weeks. Decide together on a date for coming to closure and actually following through with signing up for the selected activities. Money doesn't necessarily need to be a barrier to participation. Be aware that many organizations offer need based or merit scholarships for summer programs, but these fill up fast. Above all, enjoy building your village together.

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