

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Giving Kids A Positive Summer Experience

from the American Counseling Association

Every parent has heard complaints about summer boredom. Our kids may initially welcome that summer freedom, but all that empty time can sometimes become a burden.

That's where parents can help by approaching summer activities for their kids in a positive way. Some parents, for example, worry too much about their children's futures. They view summer as a time to better prepare their kids for college or that future career, even though the child may still be years away from actual college attendance.

While computer or math camps, or hospital or business internships, can be good experiences for a child with a passion to head in that direction, they often are a joyless burden when it's just mom or dad who has decided this will be a great way for their child to spend the summer. Too often kids are pushed into these camps and experiences because anxious parents are trying to fast forward their child's intellectual and educational development, or attempting to lead them toward a career path that is of the parents' choosing.

The recommendation from most experts is to remember that summer activities can be many things, but they also should be just plain fun at least some of the time. Activities that foster physical, social, cultural and artistic development are certainly positive goals summer planning should try to achieve. You want your child to gain experiences that will give them a greater understanding of themselves and the world they live in.

But in order for that to happen, it's important to focus on what the child's interests and passions are. If a child is into sports, then a sports-related camp that will improve skills and build confidence can be a great idea. The same applies for a child with an interest in art, or math, or some other specialized area. But trying to force the child with a passion for art into several weeks of basketball camp, just because mom and dad thinks he or she needs to be more well rounded, is a recipe for an unhappy child.

It's not necessary to plan and program every minute of your child's summer. A little boredom is fine and better than over-programming to keep your child constantly busy. But trying to help your child engage in activities that he or she really cares about and enjoys can make summer a positive, fun experience for the entire family.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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