

Staying Organized When School Lets Out



School will be letting out soon for the summer and the kids will be home all day. That means rearranging your schedule to accommodate summer camps and trips to the pool and family vacation – it also means that your kids will be having friends over and tearing your house up while you're at work! How on earth will you stay organized once the wild rumpus begins?

Time for a little advance planning

The only way to survive the warmer months of the year when you have kids is to be two steps ahead of the game. Don't wait until the last bell rings before you plot out your schedule for the summer. Sit down together as a family and discuss all the activities that you want (and need) to fit in before classes start back. That includes out-of-town trips, incoming visitors, work projects, and kids' programs (at the library, the YMCA, the local community center.) Put in your vacation request at work early, and don't forget to factor in those long weekends involving a federal holiday (like the Fourth of July or Labor Day.) Then plot everything out on a calendar, and scan the horizon for time crunches and scheduling conflicts. Remember, compromise is the key to harmony in any family, so each person needs to be willing to give a little to make the whole thing work.

Set some limits, now

When they're unencumbered by classes and books and teachers' dirty looks, kids are hit with a sudden rush of freedom. They want to do anything and everything (usually all at the same time) to make the most of their days off. But it just may not be feasible for your child to take swim lessons, play in the summer baseball league, spend two weeks visiting relatives, AND participate in that really cool kid's science program at the university. It's up to you as the parent to keep this year's agenda under control – but let your child make the choice. Allow him to select maybe two weekly activities and one trip to take, making sure that nothing overlaps or conflicts. Remind your child that, if it won't fit in the schedule this time, he can always do it next year. You'll be helping him not only strengthen his decision-making muscle, but also start to decide what's really important and what he could live without (powerful skills to have at any age!)



Make your kids responsible

I remember summer vacations, when I had the house to myself while my parents worked. When I had friends over, we might pull out the paint and clay and get creative. Or decide to splatter an elaborate picnic lunch all over the kitchen. Or rearrange the furniture to build a fort. Or even set up an obstacle course using lawn chairs and step ladders in the yard. It's a wonder I didn't break my neck before the age of 18! There was just one rule. I could make any kind of mess I wanted during the day – as long as it was gone by the time my mom got home. Just because your kids have a huge chunk of time off, that doesn't mean that you do. Nor are you required to spend your precious hours at home cleaning up after them. Wouldn't you rather be enjoying their company and making memories, instead of sweeping and putting their toys away? I'm all for kids having adventures during their summer breaks, but there's no reason they can't also be made responsible for picking up after themselves at the same time!

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