

Positive Activities For Teens



by Lucy Rimalower, M.A

School's out for summer! The image of teens in the summertime conjures fun, adventure and boredom. Although your teens may have celebrated the end of school, they may miss the structure and social interaction of their school schedule. It's tempting for teens and busy parents to let the TV and computer act as camp counselors. However, commitments to physical activities, peer relationships and community connections are crucial in making summer a welcome break from the academic and social pressures facing teens.

Establishing Safe Boundaries

Teens may love the taste of freedom as they bask in the sun without school bells, but what about the bells and whistles at home? Here are a few points to start a discussion:

-But It's Not A School Night! - Establish ground rules with your teen about summer curfews for both weekdays and weekends.

-Who? Where? When? How? - Determine how they will keep you abreast of their location and companions during daytime outings and evening adventures. Do they need to clear it with you the night before or is there room for improvisation?

-You're So Far Away! - Be sure that your teen is clear about geographical limits, whether driving or walking.

Summertime and the Sleepin' is Easy

Without the school schedule, teens may

stay up later and sleep later. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, teens need an average of 9-11 hours of sleep per night. The trickiest part of teens sleeping late in the summer is getting back to the school sleep schedule in the fall. Be sure to give your teens warning that a few weeks before school resumes they'll need to start adjusting their sleep schedules.

Fun Ideas for an Active Summer

How can teens keep busy during their precious waking hours? Here are ten great ideas to heat up a cool summer:

1 Book Club.

While your teen may have a lofty reading list to accomplish before school resumes in the fall, what about starting a book club for the reading he enjoys? From classics like the Chronicles of Narnia to comics like Iron Man, let your teen start a weekly meeting with like-minded friends to keep brain cells firing and imaginations running. Perhaps your teen might be inspired to choose books coming soon to a theater-near-you. Blockbusters are often based on pre-existing source material.

2 Ice Cream.

It's hot out there. Your teen who enjoys cooking or baking might want a break from turning on the oven when it's 110 degrees in the shade. Teens can make ice cream without any fancy machinery and without all the fat of store-bought ice creams.

Here's a simple recipe from Kaboose.com for basic vanilla ice cream, which can be flavored with chocolate syrup, a shot of espresso, chocolate chips, marshmallows and almonds for rocky road, or any other flavor your teen enjoys.

What you'll need:

- 1-tablespoon sugar
- 1/2-cup milk or half & half (or fat-free half & half)
- 1/4-teaspoon vanilla
- 6 tablespoons rock salt
- 1 pint-size Ziploc plastic bag
- 1 gallon-size Ziploc plastic bag
- Ice cubes

How to make it:

- Fill the large bag half full of ice, and add the rock salt. Seal the bag.
- Put milk, vanilla, and sugar into the small bag, and seal it.
- Place the small bag inside the large one and seal again carefully.
- Shake until mixture is ice cream, about 5 minutes.
- Wipe off top of small bag, then open carefully and enjoy!

3 Volunteer.

Whether it's for your teen's favorite presidential candidate or a local soup kitchen, opportunities abound for teens looking to give back to their communities.

4 Make Your Garden Grow.

With lawn-watering limits enforced, allocating a small part of your garden or even a window box to your teen is a great way for the whole family to learn about sustainability and gardening with less water. Let your teen research and explore succulents and other water-conscious plants. Heirloom tomatoes can be a tasty introduction to eating organic and healthy, as well as a good start to your teen's very own salsa garden. Plus, gardening can engender responsibility and commitment.

5 Series of Peer Master Classes.

Do your teen and her friends have talents? What better venue to showcase a prized skill or a newly learned hobby than a series of master classes? Have your teen choose several friends and pick one time each week to get together. Each teen will be assigned a date to present his master class. Each meeting will feature that teen teaching his peers a new craft, be it magic, singing, sculpting, or sports trivia. This is a great opportunity for teens to learn from each other, to build confidence in their own abilities, and to strengthen their self-esteem as leaders.

6 Camping in Your Own Backyard.

With gas surpassing our worst road trip nightmares, it might not be possible for your family to get away for a rustic weekend of camping. Why not allow your teen to organize a camping trip for herself in your backyard or living room? S'mores can be microwaved, ghost stories can be just as scary by the spooky glow of the porch light, and bonding among friends can happen without the mosquitoes.

7 Boot Camp.

Without mandated P.E. classes, and with school team sports on hiatus, teens may need to be creative to come up with ways to stay healthy in the summer. Whether your local park offers a track, a hike, or a swimming pool, have your teen invent her own exercise routine. Be sure she keeps safety in mind. Perhaps an evening routine so you can join

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her after work? Don't forget the water and the sunscreen!

8 Take Up A Musical Instrument.

With many adult neighbors at work during 9-5 business hours, teens have the opportunity to discover their inner rock-star. Without disturbing anybody's sleep (including yours) teens can pick up dusty instruments that don't get time in the face of homework and reconnect with a lost love of music.

9 Summer School...No wait! Elective Summer School.

It's hard to imagine your teen wanting anything academic, particularly those who may be taking summer school anyway. However, taking an elective course of interest at a community college or university extension program may be an interesting way to get your teen excited about going to college in just a few years. Los Angeles Valley College offers courses to students starting in Kindergarten!

10 Spend Time with Your Teen.

While you may not have time off to enjoy the lazy days of summer with your teen, adding some extra bonding time into the summer routine is essential to helping your teen feel connected and supported, particularly when the comfort of the regular routine is on vacation. Make a commitment to spend time with your teen, whether it's a weeknight dinner or a Sunday brunch, but not too early of course.

References

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Lucy Rinalower, M.A. is a psychotherapist in private practice in Beverly Hills, under the supervision of Dr. Jenn Berman. She also has an upcoming journal article that will be published in *Sex Education*. She conducts groups on body image and self-esteem with teens and adults.

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