

A monthly newsletter published by Interface EAP

Enjoy Some Summer Activities

It's summertime, school is out, and many families are at their wit's end about how to fill three months of their children's free time. Whether your child is a preschooler or school-age, a wealth of opportunities for fun, educational, and even relaxing activities are possible. Here are some tips that may be useful for families and caregivers:

Visit the Library.

Historically, libraries offered little or nothing for children below the age of three, but recently many have introduced programs for toddlers. Children and adults can participate in activities that may include reading aloud, storytelling, finger-plays, rhymes, and songs. Preschoolers usually enjoy the group activities offered by libraries, where they can participate in puppet shows and arts and crafts activities. For elementary school children, there are variations of the read-alouds and storytelling hours that often include discussions and presentations by the children themselves, as well as summer reading programs. Many public libraries also offer training courses for children in using different software or educational programs.

Discover Geography.

What makes a place special? What are the physical characteristics of your hometown? Take children for a walk around your neighborhood and look at what makes it unique. Point out how it is similar to other places you have been and how it is different. If you live near a park, a lake, a river, a stream or a creek, take your children there and spend time talking about its uses. Read stories about distant places with children or sing songs to teach geography, for example "Home on the Range" or "California, Here I Come." Make a wish list of places you would like to visit with your child. Look them up on a map and plan a trip there—real or pretend.

View and Create Collections.

Go to a children's museum to view hands-on exhibits or suggest that your children start a "collection" and build their own museum. They can collect natural materials, such as acorns and leaves from a local park or seashells from the beach.

Nature's Best.

Older children can learn about weather by using a map to look up the temperature of cities around the world and discovering how hot each gets in the summer. Watch cloud formations and imagine. Do the shapes look like horses, ducks or other animals? At night, children can collect fireflies in jars, or depending on

their age, camp out in a tent in the back yard. Create a treasure map for children to find hidden treats in the yard. Read about your state bird and state flower, and if possible, bicycle ride to a nearby park to find them.

Use Community Resources.

Watch for special events, such as free outdoor music festivals or concerts. Many communities host evening concerts in local parks—pack a picnic dinner and enjoy time with your family. People are resources too—collectors, painters, and backyard naturalists may live in your neighborhood, eager to share their knowledge with children.

Rainy Day Activities.

Summertime often brings thunderclouds. On days when outdoor activities are not possible, you can share family history and photos with your children. Pull out the old videos of past family gatherings and events. Prepare an indoor picnic with your child or cook dinner together. Whatever the activity, children can enjoy and appreciate the summer months in ways that are both educational and stress reducing for all involved.





Help Staff Express Stress

While a certain level of stress can be motivating, stress overload decreases creativity and productivity. Here are five ways to help staff acknowledge and release tension:

Make ‘em laugh. When it comes to stress, laughter truly is the best medicine. Book a local comedian for a one-hour lunch break or rent a DVD of a live show. If you’re a skilled presenter, create a tongue-in-cheek awards show honoring staff for contributions like Most Entertaining Response to A Crashed Computer.

Book a masseuse. You’ll score a lot of points with staff by scheduling a licensed masseuse for on-site, 15-minute head, neck, and shoulder massages. The average rate is a dollar per minute. Even if you don’t have the budget to cover it, many people will be willing to self-pay.

Get them moving. Exercise is a natural stress reliever and energy booster. Encourage lunchtime walks, stretch breaks, or practice line dancing. For a gentler approach, schedule a local yoga instructor to teach relaxation and breathing techniques.

Change the environment. Get people out of the office for a change of pace. Book a local movie theater for a private screening, allow one-hour for a shopping trip with everyone sharing their best buy upon return, schedule a walking tour of a local museum, or hold a staff meeting in different location.

When Things Don’t Go As Planned

While planning is always recommended, sometimes even the best plans don’t go exactly as expected. Here are five tips to help you remain productive and positive when things don’t go as you originally hoped they would.



1. Remain calm. A surefire way to ensure your day is really unproductive is to waste most of it getting frantic, frustrated and angry. Stay calm and you’ll be able to begin formulating and implementing solutions in the most productive, stress-free manner.

2. Focus on the solution. Rather than complaining about the problem, focus your mind and energy on the solution(s). For example, if you just burned the roast and company is arriving in a half hour, don’t focus on the burnt roast. Focus on where the nearest Chinese take-out restaurant is or focus on a meal you can whip up quickly in the meantime. If you can’t get a report to a customer when you promised it, don’t waste time being frustrated over missing the deadline. Determine when you can get the customer his report and what you can do in addition to make up for this mishap.

3. List your possibilities. If you didn’t originally have a back-up plan, brainstorm (yourself or with others) and then make a written list of options. It is easier to choose a plan when you can glance through all of the possible alternatives.

4. Divvy up some tasks. Very often, when original plans don’t happen as expected, back up plans require additional tasks that need to be done. Whenever possible, delegate these duties to others, such as family members, friends or associates. Dinner guests arriving early? Ask your oldest son to prepare the dinner salad. Deadline was moved up? Coordinate a team of co-workers to rally, stay at work a bit later and get that project done.

5. Don’t sweat it. Regardless of how bad things may turn out, try not to sweat it. Realize that things aren’t always going to work out, chalk it up to experience and look ahead to the future. Make a list of what went wrong and how you can help ensure it doesn’t happen again. Focus on ‘what’s next’ rather than dwelling on the past.

Dispelling Myths About Social Drinking

Enjoying wine, beer or spirits is a common activity in many social situations. Although alcohol can be viewed as a good way to relax and unwind, it's important to note that behavioral influences play an important role in determining how much alcohol a person consumes and its subsequent effect on activities and emotions.

"Alcohol is a social lubricant," explains G. Alan Marlatt, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Washington. "A person's drinking behavior is motivated to a large extent by social anxieties and psychological expectations."

To help gain an understanding of alcohol in social settings, Dr. Marlatt, who has conducted extensive research on social drinking, provides insight into some commonly held beliefs about alcohol consumption.

Myth 1: A person who drinks will be more sociable than a person who doesn't.

Reality: Although a drink or two can help an anxious person feel more relaxed, alcohol alone does not make a person more attractive, interesting, or witty.

"People have strong beliefs about how alcohol changes behavior," Dr. Marlatt says. "We've found that people's beliefs about how they appear while drinking differ from the perceptions of others around them." Dr. Marlatt says, for example, that men may think they're more attractive after having a few drinks. Yet when women are asked about these men, they don't agree.

Myth 2: People who drink can't help how they act.

Reality: Alcohol can have physical and emotional effects, but Dr. Marlatt explains that a person's reactions to drinking are equally controlled by psychological perceptions.



In a study by Dr. Marlatt, young male drinkers were given drinks they thought contained alcohol, but, in fact, did not. As the subjects consumed the "alcoholic" drinks, their behavior changed dramatically, becoming more aggressive, loud, and flirtatious.

"People have been conditioned to believe they'll react in certain ways if they consume alcohol," Dr. Marlatt said. "It's more about you and where you decide to put yourself that controls how you will act when drinking."

Myth 3: People feel better if they drink.

Reality: Although drinking provides a social and behavioral disinhibition which may be experienced as a stimulating effect, it has diminishing effects over time, including slow speech, reduced coordination, and depression.

"People unrealistically think of alcohol as a magic elixir," Dr. Marlatt says. "They don't seem to remember the corresponding negative effects that go along with alcohol consumption, such as hangovers and depression."

Staying in control

Being a smart social drinker requires staying in control, setting limits and realizing how your perceptions and surroundings can affect your behavior. If you're planning to attend an event where you don't know many people, determine beforehand how many drinks you will have. By drinking slowly and being aware of your surroundings, you can stay in control and not feel easily swayed into drinking more than you normally might.

Stress

Financial

Legal

Depression

For free and confidential assistance, call your
Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:

(713) 781-3364
(800) 324-4327

Se Habla Español
(800) 324-2490

Marital Problems

Family Problems

Alcohol/Drug Problems

Other Referrals

www.4eap.com

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide you an Employee Assistance Program.