

Five Tips for Making Summer Vacation Less Stressful for Parents and Teens

By Hugh C. McBride

If ever an event is guaranteed to evoke divergent emotions, it is the start of summer vacation for high school students. As the calendar flips from May to June, students begin to celebrate their impending freedom and parents brace themselves for stresses and struggles that give a whole new meaning to the phrase "long hot summer."

But it doesn't have to be this way. Regardless of what previous summer vacations have taught you about the pressures that await your family, 12 weeks without school doesn't have to transform your living room into a battlefield.

No one is promising an entirely stress-free experience (I mean, we are talking about raising a teen here), but the following tips can help make summer less painful and perhaps even a pleasant experience for the whole family.

Summer Vacation Tip #1: Set a Schedule

There's a good chance that a significant portion of your teen's summer dreams involve, well, dreaming. From post-noon wake-ups to midday naps, extended snooze sessions can be among summer's most enticing opportunities for sleep-deprived, school-stressed teenagers.

While there's no reason to insist that your teen rise with the sun during summer vacation, there are more than a few justifications for opposing a "wake me for dinner" mentality. But dragging your teenager out of bed only to have him subject you to a series of sighs and eye rolls isn't going to be good for either of you.

Instead, set a schedule that will encourage your teen to be not only awake, but active during the pre-noon hours of summer vacation. Sample morning rituals include the following:

1. **Morning chores** - If your teen wants some freedom during his summer vacation days (and what teen doesn't want some freedom during summer vacation?), trade afternoon hours for morning chores. The benefits: Your teen is awake, your household chores are taken care of, and there's no daylong back and forth about what needs to be done. If the chores are done by a pre-determined time, afternoon activities are allowed; if the work isn't done, the afternoon schedule is curtailed or called off.
2. **Morning activities** - If your teen is a swimmer (or wants to learn), sign her up for morning lessons or a community team that practices during the a.m. hours. If your teen needs an academic boost, find a morning tutoring program (which serves the dual purpose of getting him out of bed and getting the "painful" part of the day out of the way).
3. **Morning work** - A stagnant economy may make the summer job search a bit more difficult than usual. But if your teen is serious about looking for summer work, encourage her to find (or create) a job that she can do during the morning. For example, if she starts a lawn-mowing business, encourage her to schedule her appointments for the morning, before the hottest part of the day.

Summer Vacation Tip #2: Negotiate

Realistically, handing your teen a schedule of morning chores, activities, and work assignments is not going to end your summer vacation stress. But anything you can do to encourage your teen to buy into (or take ownership of) the summer plan will make the process go much smoother.

Sit down with your teen and discuss your hopes and plans for summer vacation. Perhaps you can trade hours (morning chores for afternoon fun), or maybe you can ease some restrictions (for example, an extended curfew) in exchange for desired behaviors (phoning home at predetermined times when out of the house, or completing a certain number of chores).

In addition to reducing your teen's resistance to the summer vacation schedule, negotiating will make enforcement of punishments a bit more palatable, too, because your teen will know the penalty before he violated the rule.

Summer Vacation Tip #3: Encourage Activities

From volunteer experiences to summer internships to organized sports, summer vacation is an excellent time for teens to explore topics that interest them, but that they may not have the opportunity to delve into during the school year.

If your teen enjoys sports, summer vacation is a great time to participate in a league or take part in a short-term skills camp. For teens who are interested in sports but who don't want to play, many youth leagues are always on the lookout for officials, scorekeepers, and coaches.

If your family's financial situation is such that paid employment isn't a requirement for your teen during summer vacation, think about volunteer work or an unpaid internship. In addition to boosting your teen's college resume, these opportunities can also give your teen real-world work experience and insights into a career field that she is interested in.

Summer Vacation Tip #4: Consider Summer Camp

If your only knowledge of summer camp comes from a mosquito-infested week in the late 1950s, then you need to take a second look at the many opportunities that are available for young campers in the 21st century.

Forget leather crafts and burnt marshmallows - summer camp opportunities today include computer camp, finance camp, theater camp, wilderness camp, space camp, adventure camp, and many more.

In addition to topic-centered summer camps, experienced professionals also operate innovative summer camps that are designed to support, motivate, and provide a memorable summer experience for all types of teens, including overweight children and kids with learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and certain types of autism. In addition to providing a nurturing and accepting environment, **weight loss summer camps and summer camps for special students** can provide long-term educational, emotional, and therapeutic benefits for these children.

Summer Vacation Tip #5: Don't Rule Out the Wilderness

If your teen has a history of behavior problems, defiance, substance abuse, or related challenges, summer vacation can be a difficult time both for him and for you. In the absence of the structure and support that is provided during the school year, summer vacation can cause significant backsliding in the behaviors of troubled teens and at-risk teens.

To avoid these problems, and to turn summer vacation from a negative experience into a positive educational opportunity, educate yourself about the many therapeutic **wilderness programs for troubled teens** that have been established over the past few decades. In addition to helping your teen with issues related to behavior, mental health, and substance abuse, a summer wilderness program for troubled teens can also instill leadership values, personal responsibility, and a heightened sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

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