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FAMILY TIES

Summertime, Summertime

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

When I'm driving in my car, I generally listen to WGN radio in Chicago. I heard one of the hosts talk about a trip he took with his family. One Sunday they got on the train, rode to a stop some miles from home, got off, bought hot dogs at a nearby stand, hopped back on the train and rode it back home. Later in the day they took the train to another destination and had a grand time—all for about \$12. His point was that it doesn't have to cost a lot to do something fun as a family.

This experience reminds me that summertime is just around the corner. This is a great time to make plans for when school is out. One of the best things you can do for your children is to view summer as a time to expand their world and make memories. The experiences you provide will help your children retain what they have learned in school and be more ready for school to start in the fall.

This summer, why not plan a family activity each week? Activities need to last at least 30 minutes, but they can last much longer. Don't wait for a financial windfall, start putting money aside for summer activities now. My suggestion is to find things to do that you can afford, as it certainly takes away from the fun when you have to pay for an experience after the fact.

When at home, show your children how to operate appliances appropriate to their age. Have them assist in cooking and housekeeping. Remember that home should be a safe place to learn and practice many new skills. Summer is a great time to encourage reading, build collections and work on hobbies. A child who learns to concentrate on activities often becomes very competent, and constructive activities increase self-confidence and raise self-image. Build family closeness and reading abilities by planning time to read together on a regular basis.



School-age children can help plan a trip, be it for a day or a week. They can help plan what to take, assist in packing, use the phone and the Internet to get information, figure out the route and learn to read the map.

During the summer months, children benefit from a balance of free time and organized activities. Some parents keep children so busy with lessons and excursions that they don't have

quiet time, or time to spend alone. On the other hand, we know that when children spend time in organized activities, they will be more in control and will find it easier to resist negative peer pressure. Children tend to get into trouble when they are bored or are looking for stimulation. The child with interesting, challenging, constructive and planned fun doesn't have time for, or as much interest in, negative activities. When your child is involved in healthy activities, he or she is more likely to meet and associate with healthy peers.

A child who has fun in a wholesome way is a happier child. And happier children are more receptive to their parents. Your family will benefit from your putting together plans for summertime learning and adventures together!

Susan Murray is an associate professor of behavioral sciences and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.