

SUMMER SURVIVAL GUIDE

If you are like me, you may be viewing the approaching summer with a mixture of excitement and dread. Depending on parents' work schedule it could be a mad scramble trying to find childcare and summer camps or you may be dreading the long days of keeping your child entertained, stimulated and out of trouble for eight weeks!

Many parents think that keeping their child occupied 24-7 will be beneficial for them. Have you heard of the term *"White Space?"* In the visual arts world, it is a term often referred to as a negative space; a portion in art or designs that is left unmarked, empty, and blank. Just like white space is important in the art world by giving balance and defining boundaries, white space in a child's life is important because it gives them a chance to stop, pause and breathe.

This summer, I am giving parents of Northern Gateway Public School students a terrifying suggestion (or a double dog dare, if you will): Give your child a full 24 hours with no internet, no video games, no phone, and yes, no chores. After an initial mental break down from you and your child, surprising things will happen...they (and you) will discover imagination, innovation, adventure and natural curiosity.

Why do we fear "unplanned time" or "white space"?

In today's generation it's almost the norm to keep our children occupied at all times. Whether it's scheduled play dates, school, sports, video games or electronics. Some of us see unplanned time as a waste or fear that it could lead to our child getting into trouble. Or the darlings drive us a little crazy with their constant complaints on "being bored" or fighting among themselves.

At the risk of aging myself, I challenge parents this summer to go back to a few of parenting styles of the **1970's** and **'80's**. Okay, I am not saying to ditch the bicycle helmets and car seats and have your precious angels roll around the back of a station wagon, but I think we can all lighten up on the expectations to provide constant entertainment for our children over the summer months. Crack open a Tab, spray some "Sun-in" on your hair and relax.

For those of you younger than me and may not know what a **'70's** and **'80's** summer looks like, here a few ideas:

1. *They can play outside. All Day.*

*If they're thirsty, drink from the hose

*Run through the sprinklers

- *Swim in a kiddie pool
- *Spray each other with water guns
- *Search for ladybugs
- *Play hide and seek between houses
- *Run down the street gutters after a rain storm
- *Read under a tree
- *Catch butterflies
- *Put a spider in a jar
- *Camp in the back yard or on the trampoline.
- *Build a fort out of whatever they can find. Their creativity will be in full swing by this time, and they will readily seek out unique materials.
- * "Home Free", "Kick the Can" or "Man Tracker" with neighborhood kids, siblings, cousins, or even mom and dad! It is even more exciting in the dark!

1 ***They can make stuff from whatever they can find.***

No trips to Michaels or Dollarama for pre-cut, pre-stuck, pre-fabricated crafts. Find stuff in the garage or shed or under the deck and assemble it into something they can play with. No, they can't Google how to do it, there's no internet, remember?

2 ***They can put on a talent show.*** A real, genuine, sing and dance and entertaining talent show. No theme, no requirements, no directions, no anything. There is no right way to do it, and no you can't go on Pinterest for ideas. Children have an imagination will learn how to use it.

3 ***They can set up a stand,*** sell lemonade, freezies, popsicles, juice, Kool-Aid (yup, the kind with red food dye), Tang (is this even a thing anymore?), whatever you have on hand. The bonus is they will have extra cash for when the ice cream truck drives by! My dad always told me, never drive past a lemonade stand, even if you're not thirsty. Leave a generous tip, and tell the kids it is the best lemonade you have ever tasted.

4 ***Send them on a scavenger hunt*** that takes them (safely through the neighborhood) for an extended period of time. Think four leaf clover, a dead beetle, bottle cap, magpie feather or other weird, hard to find objects.

5 *They can play on a rainy day.*

*Pull out the good old board games. Don't have any? Your local second hand store will have plenty. Leave a game on the table for a couple days, guaranteed your children will start playing them.

*Have a picnic on the kitchen floor

*Build a puzzle.

Great memories happen when we lower our expectations, turn off the screens, and harness the freedom of no school schedules. In our part of the country, the sunny, hot days of summer do not last long, so let's enjoy them while we can!

"Some old-fashioned things like fresh air and sunshine are hard to beat." ~ Laura Ingalls Wilder

This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Division Social Worker. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to encourage success in school. Tammy advocates for students and provides a link between the student and other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for nearly 20 years and is a mother to 4 children, 3 of which are teenagers.