

ASK A PARENT with Dufferin Parent Support Network

Hot Summer Days...Cool Parenting ...Happy Children

July 2015



*I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days—three such days with you
I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain.*

— John Keats

Many parents have made plans for their children's time and recreation for the summer break. The point of concern when planning activities is an awareness of balance. Our children spend much of their young lives caught up in the "organized adult world." Summer is a time for personal growth, new experiences, and an excellent time to communicate and share interests.

In our time-crunched days, we want to ensure our children are taken care of and occupied with activity. When I think back to my childhood, I don't remember any organized summer activities until I was old enough to attend an overnight camp for a week. Summer days were bikes, parks, swimming in neighbours pools, sticky Popsicle fingers, endless new plots and catching moths until it was almost dark. It was a time of cuts and scrapes, arguments and laughter.

The world has changed since I was a child. Children are supervised to a greater degree but, Dr. Alex Russell, a clinical psychologist in Toronto, believes that backing off is key to raising resilient, self-confident, responsible kids. They need to fall and skin their knees as many of us did, to learn that worry is sometimes appropriate, and to experience failure (of the non-catastrophic kind), he says in his book *Drop the Worry Ball: How to Parent in the Age of Entitlement* (co-authored with Tim Falconer). Summer is the perfect time for children to flourish with adventure and responsibility and develop or find their talents.

My two girls are curious and active experimenters and adventurers! From trying to find the ideal ratio of soap and water for bubble painting to the best mixture of mud, sand, rocks and water to make cake, there is always something interesting in the works. Planning and making a picnic for an adventure is one of their favourite things to do. Last year we ventured even further than the "secret park" in search of the "fairy garden." We couldn't find the correct path so we decided to tromp along the stream. One daughter fell into the cool water, another got scratches on her legs, and I lost my sunglasses but when we reached a clearing, it was beautiful and magical. Wet bums and scratches were all forgotten in awe of this lovingly kept area. This year, we have a surprise for the fairy garden, a little fairy house to leave in the wonder treasure that is the fairy garden.

This summer the PanAm games are in the GTA offering many events not far from home. However, there are many exciting things to do practically in our backyards: hiking, cycling, checking out the new Island Lake trail, watching the tadpoles turn into baby frogs, making a photo adventure checklist for the summer, writing a story and even getting it bound with photographs or drawings from the summer. Numerous community events such as Canada Day celebrations and fireworks, Ribfest and Founder's Day activities offer plenty to do. Additionally the Orangeville Library offers free summer program and reading club. An impromptu jump in the car and go to the beach day, or even camping at home are favourites of ours. At a DPSN

meeting, another member had a perfect rainy day idea. Pick a place on a map or globe and research what it is like there. This could involve a trip to library, some dressing up, and making a snack or meal.

As our children get older, they will get summer jobs and be busy with their friends and interests. However, planning a family event or holiday can involve everyone's input and ideas. Ask them what they would like to do.

Wishing all families a wonderful summer full of memories and laughter.

Summer will end soon enough, and childhood as well.

—George R.R. Martin

Jan Pettigrew is a mother of two, educator and member of the DPSN Board of directors.