

Slow Down and Enjoy the Magic of Summertime

By Patti Teel
www.pattiteel.com

“Summertime, and the living is easy...”

Summertime is in full swing. And I don't know about you, but I'm finding it difficult to stick to a schedule and to buckle down and work. Perhaps childhood memories of long summer days spent at the neighborhood swimming pool have forever altered my cell memory—triggering an age-old urge to slow down the pace and enjoy life's simple pleasures. Rather than swimming upstream and fighting the urge to slow down, I've decided to go with the summertime flow. I hope that you and your children decide to do the same and enjoy a magical summer that includes carefree time to explore, dream and play. Soon enough, we'll once again be asking ourselves, “Where did the summer go?” Before fall arrives and back to school activities take precedence, be sure to enjoy the magical days of summer.

Unexpected, delightful events are part of the fun and wonder of the summer. But if our children's days are overscheduled, they're likely to miss these unexpected delights—and so will we, as we frenetically drive from one activity to the next. Even though your intentions may be good, avoid being overzealous about providing structured activities for your children. Be sure not to fill *all* your children's time with lessons, summer camp, team sports, or other organized events. By eliminating the summer activities that are not particularly enjoyable or important to your child, you are likely to find the time and space to enjoy the surprises of the day as they arise. Even the smallest events can be exciting to children, and it's a wonderful gift to be able to see the world through their eyes. If you unexpectedly see a beautiful butterfly, follow it with your child. If you make a wrong turn while driving, see where it takes you. If your son or daughter wants to have a last-minute lemonade stand, go for it. Enjoy the effortless flow of summertime.

Of course if you have children and work outside the home—there's no denying that your life is incredibly busy. Still, you may find that by cutting back on some of your family's extracurricular activities, you can create a more relaxed atmosphere. For example, one planned event a weekend may be great, but three or four may leave everyone in the family feeling rushed and frantic.

Each and everyday this summer, leave some time for your children to do whatever they want—even if it appears that they are choosing to do nothing at all. Don't think of it as wasted time. Children are naturally creative and you will be providing them with the necessary time and space to use this natural ability to be resourceful, self-sufficient and independent.

At first, when you step back from your full time role as the summertime entertainment director, your children may not know what to do with themselves. This will change as children gradually become more accustomed to relying on their own devices to creatively entertain themselves. Many families find that they do best when they strike a balance between free time and planned activities. For example, you may wish to keep a calendar of scheduled activities such as trips to visit relatives, outings to the zoo, library, museum, or the family vacation. But don't be tempted to over schedule, and make time at the end of each day to relax, talk or read.

Take a few quiet moments to reminisce on the simple summertime activities that brought you pleasure when you were a child. Perhaps they can become family traditions that you share with your own children and one day, with your children's children.

Dubbed “The Dream Maker” by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.