

Keep kids active and thinking during summer

I've never wanted to "over-involve" my children in too many organized activities, but this summer they don't seem to be interested in doing much of anything except playing video games and watching television. I don't want them to waste the entire summer, but I'm out of ideas. Any suggestions?

It's ironic: These days, it's very easy for both children and adults to become so busy that they don't have time for rest and relaxation, and for the complete opposite to occur — to be so lackadaisical that we spend most of our time sitting in front of a screen.

Finding a middle ground is a good goal. Focus on activities that will exercise either the brain or muscle groups, or, ideally, both.

According to educators with Ohio State University Extension, studies show that one of the most effective ways to increase physical activity in children is to get them to spend more time outdoors. You also want to be sure to incorporate activities to spark brain activity, as well, to pave the way for your children to ease into schoolwork in the fall. Some ideas:

- Take the kids on a treasure hunt by going geocaching with them. By using a GPS app on your smart phone or some other type of GPS device, take the kids for a hike to find hidden containers, or geocaches. Get started at the official geocaching page, geocaching.com,



which says there are more than 2.4 million active geocaches worldwide. In addition, the website's blog offers "5 Tricks of the Trade for Geocaching with Kids" at blog.geocaching.com/2014/04/5-tricks-of-the-trade-for-geocaching-with-kids/.

- Go to a farmers market. Get children involved by letting them choose items to buy, and follow up by enlisting their help in the kitchen as you use the items for snacks or meals.

- Forget seedless watermelon: Buy the traditional kind and hold a seed-spitting contest in the backyard. Be sure to have a tape measure handy for the kids to document the winning efforts.

- Start a new routine: Take a bike ride or visit a nearby playground or park every night after dinner. Getting you and your kids moving even for just 15 or 20 minutes in the evening would be a valuable habit to adopt.

- No time for camping? Make plans to set up a tent in the backyard and sleep outdoors.

- Join the local library's story time or summer reading club.

- Make plans to visit a county fair, local festivals or state parks.

- Taking a summer vacation? Get an up-to-date road atlas and show the kids how to follow your route on a map.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Family Fundamentals*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Carmen Irving, Healthy Relationships program specialist in Family and Consumer Sciences for Ohio State University Extension.

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