

Activities for Anytime of Year

Day at the Museum

Museums usually have a little something for everyone. History, art, artifacts, re-creations and interactive exhibits and activities are just a few of the attractions that can get your child's attention and get them asking questions. Museums are fun, educational, and provide a lot of topics that can be discussed on the spot or at home. For younger kids, a children's museum is a great place to spend a weekend afternoon.

Home Improvement

Kids take greater pride in where they live when they can help with a project that makes your home a nicer place to live. Depending on the ages of your children, they can help you paint, wash windows, clean out closets, build a birdhouse for the backyard, hang family photos, and many other tasks. This is a great way to teach kids how to safely use tools (make sure they're age appropriate), plan how to accomplish a project and organize materials. Kids also will enjoy the feeling of accomplishment they get from completing a task.

Make a Splash

Teaching your kids to swim instills self-confidence and stresses the importance of being safe around the water. If your kids already swim well, you can have "cannonball" contests to see who can make the biggest splash or swimming races. Don't forget the sunscreen.

It's Show Time!

There's nothing like a cool theater, a box of popcorn and an entertaining flick on a hot afternoon. When you get home, let the kids be "movie reviewers" and talk about what they liked or didn't like about the movie. Before you go, have the kids look through the newspaper or check websites for movie selections and times, and let them choose what the family will see. Do some homework of your own to make sure the movie your family is going to is family friendly and appropriate for all the kids. If there's still one in or near your community, take the kids to a drive-in movie. It's a piece of nostalgia your kids will love!

Road Trip

Taking a vacation is wonderful family activity. It's a time to unwind, take a break from the daily grind, turn off the cell phone and focus on what really matters – each other. A vacation doesn't have to be extravagant, but it should include new adventures and create some fun memories. Let the kids help plan the getaway, whether it's a day trip or a week out of town.

Bike Ride

Kids Guide - Let your kids navigate the neighborhood while you take a back seat ... or a bicycle seat. Let them map out the route and give them control to lead the way. Make your expectations clear for the kids: let them know long the bike ride should be and whether they are allowed to cross certain streets, etc. This is a good way to help children gain self-confidence and self-control. Putting them in a leadership position also helps children find their voice.

Non-Traditional Materials Kite

Let your kids unleash their creativity by challenging them to build a kite out of non-traditional materials they find around the house. Before they start the project, talk about what a kite needs to fly. They'll need materials that are light and have good "air-catching" abilities. Who knows, you could end up with a kite made out of pillow cases, wrapping paper tubes and a popcorn string tail! This can be done as a family project, with each member contributing a material. Or, everyone can build their own kite. Either way, it's a fun way for all family members to get involved. (This is also a great opportunity to have your kids practice the skills of following instructions, sharing, working together and asking for help.)

Have the Kids Plan a Holiday

For the Fourth of July, Father's Day or Labor Day, let the kids plan the festivities. Give them instructions to build a day for the whole family and include activities that each family member will enjoy. Take NO part in the planning. It will be fun to see what they come up with, and the holiday is guaranteed to be a fun day. If you have more than one child, this is a good way to teach them to work as a team and practice their leadership skills. Who knows, maybe you'll start a new holiday tradition.

Bubbles!

Who doesn't love bubbles? We've put a new twist on the bubble play. Throw out the store-bought bubbles and make your own. Be creative and visit the internet for ideas! What can you make bubbles out of? Can you make them colored? How? Can you make them smell good? How? Can you make them come out of the end of a paper towel roll? Can you make square bubbles? Here are some places to find other fun "bubble maker" ideas.

Bubble Snakes: - <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Bubble-Snake-Maker>

Frozen Bubbles: - <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Frozen-Bubble>

Family Game Night

Challenge your kids to make their own board game. Talk about what makes a good game and what they enjoy about the games they like to play. Let them spend the day on it. Then have the whole family come together after dinner to play it. After the game, ask them about how they "built" it. What challenges did they have? Did they have to change their approach? Were there things they wanted to do but couldn't? How would they improve what they did? Having them reflect on the process is a good "life-lesson" exercise. For example, you can talk about how the challenges they faced when building the game are like challenges in life. Things don't always go exactly as they would like, but they can come up with other options and make them work.

Get Into the Act

Have your kids write a play ... that you have to act out. Then hand them a play you've written that they have to present. It may be a little scary for your kids to get up in front of you, but this is a great way for them to learn how to role-play. Most of Boys Town's skills are taught using "practice" sessions where parents and their kids play different roles to help them learn appropriate behaviors. The more comfortable they are with role-playing, the easier it will be for them to focus on what you are teaching. Also, when you are presenting the play your kids wrote, you can model the skill of role-playing and then reinforce it as your kids use it when they "take the stage."

Bad Habits Campfire

Have everyone in the family think about a bad habit they would like to quit over the year and write it down on a piece of paper. Then build a controlled campfire in your backyard. To be safe, use a fire pit, an old grill or a trash-burning can. (Be sure to check the open-burning laws in your community before doing this one.) Have your family sit around the campfire and give each person a chance to discuss what habit he or she is giving up and why. Make sure to support each other's decisions on what to give up, no matter how silly it may be. This is a good opportunity for kids to learn about how family member should support each other and how other support systems (teachers, coaches, mentors, etc.) can help them as they grow. Make sure your kids have a plan for who they can talk to or what they should do if they have trouble reaching their goal. And, of course, make s'mores when you're done!

Backyard Camping

This is a great way to get away from your phone, the TV and other technology and enjoy some family time. Camping in the backyard is a lot of fun, especially if you have younger children. To get started, make sure each family member has something to do to help prepare the "campsite." For example, your kids can bring a book to read or a board game to play, or get a flashlight so they can challenge each other later in a game of shadow charades. If you have a tent, set it up (for a bigger challenge, let your kids take on this task). If you don't have a tent, drape some blankets over a swing set or a table to make a pretend tent. Make it simple and make it fun. Don't forget the snacks and soft drinks!

Dream Chalk

Go out to the driveway, patio or other cement surface and have your children use sidewalk chalk to draw what they want to be when they grow up. Have your child talk about why they think this would be a fun or rewarding job or career. When the drawings are complete, take a picture of each child by his or her creation. If you do this activity every year, you can look back at the photos with your kids and talk about how their "dreams" and interests stayed the same or changed from year to year. This is a good tool to start discussions with your children about pursuing dreams and what it takes to make them a reality. Talk about what they can do today (get good grades in school, practice the piano every day, read about a certain career or profession) to help get them reach their dream in the future.

Family Spelling or Geography Bee

Whether it's spelling words or naming the capitals of countries around the world, it's fun for kids to quiz their parents and for parents to quiz their kids. Most importantly, it's a time when families can enjoy learning together. The more you are able to model this kind of behavior for your children, the more likely they are to learn one of the best lessons of all – that learning can be fun! (There are several tools online to get you started and they usually are broken down by age or grade level.)

The Story Goes Like This...

Take 10 sheets of printer paper, fold them over and staple the edge to create a "book." Make one for each family member. Then get the whole family together (after dinner?) and give each person his or her book to work on. Have a good supply of pencils, markers and crayons so everyone can draw a cover, come up with a title and write a story on the inside pages. The "authors" also can illustrate their books with drawings. Listen to some music as you work and tell everyone to let their imaginations run wild. When the books are completed, pass them around so everyone can enjoy the family's new homemade library or have each person read his or her book to the rest of the family.

If You Plant It, It Will Grow

Plant a family garden together. Let your kids choose the vegetables, spices and flowers they want to raise, and work with them on the computer to find information on how, when and where to plant the kids' selections. Then buy some seeds and potting soil, gather your gardening tools and get started! Make sure your kids help tend and water the plants and pull weeds during the growing season. When it's time to pick the vegetables and spices or cut the flowers, let your kids help with the harvest. With food plants, you can teach your kids how to prepare them or use them in cooking. This is a great opportunity to discuss healthy eating habits and where our food comes from.

What's Cookin'?

For a week or two, have your kids take turns picking their favorite meal for dinner. Have them help you cook the meal and write down the recipe and cooking instructions for each dish on a notecard. Then collect all the cards and have the kids start pasting them into a photo album. This is the start of your new family cookbook! This is a great activity for all ages. Older kids can learn how to make some of your favorite recipes that may have been passed down through generations of your family. Younger kids can illustrate the book by drawing pictures of the finished dishes next to the recipe cards. You also can have the kids create a cover and include photos of them eating their favorite foods. Every time you have a meal everyone enjoys, add it to the book. When your kids get older, a copy of the cookbook makes an excellent high school graduation gift, especially if you've faithfully added photos and drawings as they grew up.