

SURVIVING THE SUMMER WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT



Laurie Stephens, Ph.D.
Director of Clinical Services
Education Spectrum
lstephens@edspec.org

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WHY SWEAT??

- **Children with special needs typically require a high degree of structure**
- **Its provided at school, but hard to achieve at home**
- **Children don't always know how to deal effectively with leisure time**
- **Change is difficult for many**

WHY SWEAT?

- Taking time off work
- Finding the right camp, care program
- Cuts to funding sources may limit child's summer programming options
- Limited social opportunities
- It's HOT!!

WHERE TO START



- **Once you know the summer schedule, review it with your child**
- **On “free” days, it is best to still provide structure**
- **Having a set wake up/ bed time helps child with good sleep hygiene**
- **Remember, teenagers do need more sleep than younger children!**

WHERE TO START

- Try to keep isolated play (video games, computer) to a minimum
- Consider a behavior system where child earns time to engage in such activities
- Harder to wean child off these at start of school
- Consider some academic computer time in exchange for game-playing

WHERE TO START

- **Allow child some choice in the daily schedule**
- **Try not to “over schedule” child- may need some time to decompress**
- **Have schedule written out in advance & review regularly**
- **Have camps/vacation time clearly marked on calendar**

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- **Structure and consistency lead to better behaved children**
- **Always reinforce the positive behaviors- stronger than punishment**
- **We all function under a “token economy”- do not hesitate to implement one!**
- **Premack Principle: must engage in less desirable task to earn more desirable one**



GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Always tell child what to do, not what not to do
- Do not use things such as summer school or camp as a “threat”
- If an activity/ situation is not working out, change it!
- Child should have choice, but not control

CHOOSING A CAMP

- **First question-**
 - **Special Needs Camp vs “Mainstream” Camp**
- **Think about the pro’s and cons of each environment**
- **Make a “Wish List” for your child’s experience**
- **Start looking NOW!!**

CHOOSING A CAMP

- *Pro's of a Special Needs Camp:*
- Environment geared to your child's specific needs
- Trained staff
- Opportunity to socialize with peers with the same issues
- Ability to “network” with families in your (similar) situation
- Rules/activities of camp appropriate

CHOOSING A CAMP

- Con's of a Special Needs Camp:
- Distance of camp- need to commute
- Higher cost of specialized camps
- Not all children with a particular sp. need are alike- different accommodations work for different children
- ?? Training of counselors

CHOOSING A CAMP

- *Pro's of a Community Camp:*
- Chance for child to interact with non-disabled peers in low-pressure/non-academic setting
- Closer to home
- Less expensive
- Can go to camp with siblings/neighbors
- Allows people in community to get to know your child & understand his/her needs & abilities

CHOOSING A CAMP

- *Con's of a Community Camp:*
- Environment/activities may be inappropriate or inaccessible to your child
- Inadequate supervision/ reliance on untrained youth as counselors
- Poor bullying policy/monitoring
- Without appropriate support, child may not conform to expectations & be asked to leave
- Child may be ignored, under/over-stimulated

WHAT TO TELL THE CAMP

- **Regardless of type of camp- you want to be sure the camp “knows” your child**
- **Question of revealing diagnosis is personal**
- **Do not assume that even a specialized camp will know how to best work with your child**
- **Be upfront about any behavioral issues**
- **Always provide dietary restrictions/ ask about dietary policies**

WHAT TO TELL THE CAMP

- **Ask yourself- what are the top three things the camp should know about my child**
- **Consider sending this information along with application**
- **However, KISS (keep it short & simple)**
- **If sleep-away camp, think about type of roommate/ sleeping arrangements**

CHOOSING A CAMP

- Questions to ask:
- What is the experience of the staff; training?
- Can my child have a 1:1 aide? Who provides? Who pays?
- Behavior modification program/discipline procedures?
- Individualized behavior programs?
- Is there transportation?
- Are other services provided?

PLAY DATES

- Initial play dates need to be kept short and highly structured
- First ones should be in a familiar place for the child
- Hand-select peer(s) by who child gravitates toward, or who approaches child
- For older children, look for peers with similar interests
- Discuss any goals in advance with parent's of peer



PLAY DATES

- For young children- have play date in distractor-free area (e.g. only train set & 1 other toy available)
- Can work on conversation at McDonald's and then allow kids to play on equipment
- Avoid park unless you know child will interact with peers there
- Place photo of child coming over on your schedule

PLAY DATES

- In planning play date, keep in mind the child's developmental play level
- Parallel play is a starting point!
- Remember what is typical play for the "age" or typical child behavior- Not sharing!
- Peek-a-Boo, Hide and Seek, Chase- all develop problem solving skills
- Try to facilitate pretend play by having costumes, action figures, etc available
- Going to movies, renting video is good for promoting conversation afterward!

PLAY DATES



- **Structuring play dates:**
 - Have an activity with clear beginning & end
 - Pick activity both can participate in
 - Naturally rewarding (e.g. baking cookies)
 - Plan in only a few minutes of unstructured time to assess how the two interact
 - Okay in the beginning to have time where the peers are not interacting but getting “used” to each other

PLAY DATES

- **Structuring play dates:**
 - **Have activities that involve turn taking/ active engagement (board games, riding bikes, doing puzzles, coloring)**
 - **Sensory activities are good (trampoline)**
 - **For older children, playing a video game together is acceptable**
 - **Try to take the focus off winning**



PLAY DATES

- **Be open and honest with peers about why child does some things:**
 - “Sometimes he spins his toys and flaps his hands to let you know he’s having fun.”
 - “Ralph gets stuck on talking about wasps- you can help him by...”
- **Intervene only when necessary**
- **Review with child: “How did you feel?”-
“How did friend feel when you said that?”
“What did friend do?”**
- **Offer role play ideas or develop a script for playing**



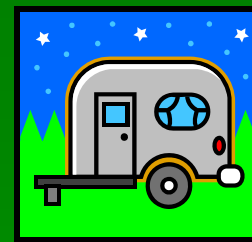
VACATIONS

- **Whenever possible- have an itinerary**
- **Review where you are going with child- show internet examples of places, hotels, museums, etc**
- **Allow child some say in activities**
- **Be sure to review weather patterns**
- **What to expect in terms of noise, crowds**





VACATIONS



- Practice novel activities, such as camping out
- Take trips to airport in advance
- If child is anxious, use systematic desensitization to control anxiety
- Have “transition” objects to add familiarity