

S.S Mommy Summer Survival Kit

Guide to Activities for Your Kids During Summer Break



Mom, What Are We Going to do over Summer Break

School days, school days, dear old golden rule days! Children may not sing that old song anymore. They probably don't know the old saying "School's out, school's out, teacher let the monkeys out" either. But there's one thing children all over the country will be saying, "Mom, I'm bored. What are we going to do over summer break?"

By now most schools will be done for the summer and won't return until the beginning to middle of August. Some lucky students won't have to return to school until late August or early September. Whatever the case may be you have at least two full months of activities to plan. Or have to listen to them complain of boredom.

With the economy and current recession many families are planning vacations at home rather than going away for a week or two. Even if you do plan a family vacation it won't be enough to keep the kids busy all summer long and the kids might even get bored while on vacation.

Consider going to a sporting goods store or discount store and invest \$20 to \$30 in a quality combination game set. These usually include volleyball net and ball, badminton net and rackets and shuttle cocks, horseshoes and stakes, and possibly some other games. Many of these sets are portable enough to carry with you when you travel and they may give your children something to occupy their time, and be fun for you, as well. Here are some more ideas to add to your summer survival kit to keep your children occupied...

Think of Yesteryear

Years ago, in neighborhoods with lots of children, there was usually one house where all the children would congregate. The kids would play together for hours and mom would have kool-aid and snacks at the ready when they needed to rest. The other moms in the neighborhood enjoyed a chance to get some housework done without the kids underfoot. If you're afraid of not getting any of your own housework done for having all the kids at your house, perhaps each mom with children in the neighborhood would be willing to help

out. You'll never know if you don't ask them. Maybe you can meet together and set up a schedule of days that each mom will welcome the children at their home.

When it's your turn to have the children at your house think back to when you were a child and the games you used to play. It's quite possible that children today don't know about games like "Red Rover," "Freeze Tag," "Mother May I," or "Red Light, Green Light." It may have been a while since you've played, but teaching them to your children and their friends can help you remember your own childhood as well as have fun with the children. Horseshoes and croquet are games your children may not be aware of, but they can provide many hours of enjoyment. These sets can be purchased at most discount stores and are games that the entire family can play together. Remember not to leave them set up in the yard, however, as they can cause injury if someone trips over them.

Outside Activities

Children of all ages love animals and the zoo. This might be a great activity for the beginning of the summer before the temperatures get too hot and the weather too humid. Arrive shortly before the gates open to take advantage of the cool of the day in hotter weather. Plan ahead by packing a picnic lunch and you'll save money on food. You might want to check with the zoo to see if they have special discount days which will also save you money.

Check with your local churches to see if they offer summer camps for the children to attend; you may consider allowing your child to participate. It will give them something to look forward to, and they may possibly do extra chores or tasks around the house to help them earn spending money. Summer camps usually run for at least a week.

If your church doesn't offer summer camp, perhaps there are day camps your children can attend during the summer. Many communities offer a variety of day camps such as art, music, sports, horseback riding, or other day camps that your child can attend.

Amusement parks are another option you may want to consider if your budget allows for it and your children would probably love it. Sunscreen, hats, and snacks are good things to pack for the day, along with several bottles of water; check with the park's policy about

bringing food and drink into the park. You may need to plan for a picnic in the parking lot so plan to bring lawn chairs and blankets.

Do your children like to go camping? You may not be able to go camping often as a family during the summer, but that doesn't stop the children from camping in the backyard. Pitch the tent and let the kids sleep outdoors when the weather permits. They will probably have a blast but will be close to home.

Create an outside obstacle course for your children or better yet, allow them to design and build their own obstacle course with old tires, small swimming pools, swing sets, or other yard toys. This will get your child thinking, and then give them an opportunity to show off for family and friends as they race against each other to see who can maneuver the course in the fastest time.

Picnics are great way to break up the monotony of summer. Pack a picnic lunch and take the kids to a local park to eat it. When you've finished and cleaned up your picnic area, take a walk along the nature trails, and try to identify birds or trees that you see there. If your children are interested, try to make a nature notebook of drawings the children make of what they find.

Speaking of nature, what could be better than spending time outside and accomplishing something at the same time? Plant a summer garden and allow the children to help with it. There's always plants to be watered, weeding to be done, and produce to pick. If you have a surplus of vegetables, you may consider setting up a roadside stand to sell the extras. The children can make and sell lemonade at the same time.

Water Fun

If you're lucky enough to live near a beach, you may choose to spend some time there during the summer. Not only can you swim, you can also have sand castle building contests, play Frisbee golf, or beach volleyball. Just remember to carry along plenty of

sunscreen (reapplying it every so often), and lots of water. You may also want to pack cool snacks like fruit to help keep your energy up.

What do you do if you don't live near a beach? Hit the local swimming hole, lake, or public pool, of course! Pack a picnic lunch, towels, and plenty to drink and have a blast. Water parks are also good places to visit where you can get wet, but they will likely cost more money than the local pool.

If you love to get wet but you don't like the expense, you can have tons of water fun in your own yard. Fill up some water balloons and have a water balloon fight. Remember the old "Slip and Slide" from years gone by? They've brought them back for a new generation of kids to enjoy.

You can also purchase pools that are easy to set up and can be taken down when the summer is over. Then you can relax by your own pool, have the benefit of being at your own home, and it will be available to you whenever you want it. You'll also have food nearby that you don't have to pack and lug with you.

Water gun wars are also a way to cool down in warmer weather. Setting up a sprinkler in the yard is another option, just be aware of how much water you're using or you might be surprised when you get your next utilities bill!

If your family is partial to water, besides swimming or going to the beach, you can spend time on the water in a boat. Boating is a great pastime, if you happen to have one available to you. Fortunately, if you live near an ocean or lake, there are usually businesses that will rent you a boat by the hour or day.

Canoeing is another type of water fun. Perhaps you can find a canoeing school where they will teach your children how to properly ride and maneuver a canoe, including safety procedures. They may even include kayaking lessons, as well.

Fishing is another great warm weather activity that will keep the family busy. Even if you don't like to actually fish, you could take along a book or something else and still enjoy the time with your family without having to touch worms or fish.

Sporting Activities

Summertime is a great time to play sports, and there are so many to choose from. Individual sports like running, roller skating, or biking can also be done with family and friends. Gather a group of children, making sure they're all decked out with proper riding pads and helmets, and another mom or two. Take a bike ride around the block or to a nearby park.

Let the children play for a while on the playground while you find a cool spot under trees that will allow you to watch the children and have a relaxing chat in the great outdoors. If you plan this fun time, be sure to apply sunscreen before leaving, and take along plenty of drinks, you know the children will ask for them.

Baseball is considered the epitome of summer time sports. If there are enough children in your neighborhood, get them together to have a game of baseball. It won't matter if they aren't all the same ages, but you may want to make sure there are some older children on each team to even the skill level out.

If you don't have enough children for actual baseball teams, that doesn't mean you can't play the sport. Moms and dads can help out by acting as the pitcher or designated hitter. Then the children can run the bases and chase after the ball when it sails into left field. You don't even have to keep score, just have fun!

Volleyball is a great sport to play in the summer. You don't have to have many children to play; in fact two children can play by themselves and still enjoy it. But, if more children come along while your children are playing, you can add them easily to the game without too much confusion.

Badminton, like tennis, may only be for two to four players, but it's easier to play than tennis. The shuttle cock is much lighter than a tennis ball, is easier to hit, and there aren't as many rules as tennis. The nice thing about badminton is that you don't need a special surface; a flat spot in the lawn will do just fine.

Soccer doesn't have to be played only during the summer, but it is a sport that the children may enjoy. Not only does it give them a chance to burn off some energy, but it also teaches them how to be on a team. Be careful, however, about allowing them to use their heads while playing. There are some concerns in the medical field about possible injury while playing.

How long has it been since you've flown a kite? This might be an activity that your children would enjoy, especially if you purchase a kite just for them. Of course, you could also try your hand at making a kite. You can find directions online or in a book at the library. Wait for a blustery day and watch the kite soar!

Perhaps your children don't like spending too much time outside because they burn easily in the sun or they have an allergy to bee stings. Your child may have valid reasons for preferring to spend most of their time indoors. They may also need activities to keep them happy while the weather is rainy or too hot.

Summertime activities don't all have to be done outside, although Mom will probably appreciate the peace in the house. There are activities that can be done indoors, as well. Here are some ideas you may want to consider.

Inside Summer Activities Away from Home

Children always enjoy having friends come over to play; plan several play dates with their favorite friends from school or church during the summer. You may also consider allowing them to have a couple of sleepovers while school is out and don't forget to allow them to sleepover at a friend's house as well.

While mentioning church friends, it's important to note that most churches will have Vacation Bible School during the summer. These would be good activities for your children to attend. Generally they last for three to five days, and for several hours each day. Allowing them to go will occupy them, help quell the "I'm bored" statements, and give you some free time for other tasks.

Does your child like art, science, or history? Visit a local art, science, or history museum. Quite often they will have free or reduced days planned, so check with each of them to see if there are discounts. If their discount days are on the same day, consider going to one museum a month.

Take a trip to your city's library and allow the children to each check out a couple of books. Make time each day for the children to read. Most libraries have summer reading programs. Sign your children up and keep track of the books they read. They may be able to get credit for reading when school starts.

Some ice cream manufacturers, candy manufacturers, and drink manufacturers allow group tours on certain days each week. Call the local factories and ask when and if they give tours, the number of people required for the tour, and what ages are allowed to visit. At the end of the tour, some companies will also give out samples of what they make. What about the local police and fire departments? They're generally open to having children tour their facilities. Call and ask them if they have any tour dates open. Not only will the children be able to learn something about these public servants, but it may also help solidify a child's desire to work in one of these fields.

Newspapers and radio stations may also be available for tours during the summer. They may have age limits, based upon where the tour takes them in the building. Local factories may also be willing to give tours, especially if you know someone in management.

Quite often movie theaters will offer reduced or free movies for a couple of weeks during the summer. These are really great when there is rain or it's just too hot to play outside. Besides the opportunity to cool off, you may also be able to see some movies you were interested in but never made it to the theater to see.

Check with the Chamber of Commerce in your city. They may be aware of other places of interest in your city or county that would be interesting to visit. You never know what is available until you ask.

Bowling, ice skating, or roller skating are activities children usually enjoy. Check with these businesses to see what their summer hours are, if they have reduced rate dates, or if there are special times set aside for smaller children. Ask them if there is food available in the building or if you're allowed to bring food from outside. If they allow it, this may help you to save some money.

Inside Activities at Home

If you can't leave the house, there are still things that your children can do to keep themselves occupied. Whether your child likes to be active, or enjoys being quiet, here are some things to help keep your child busy in the house.

In the Kitchen

Children love to eat, so it makes sense that they would enjoy learning to cook. Teach them how to bake cookies and then allow them to give some of them away to those less fortunate. If they're really interested, they may choose to put together some cookie gifts in a jar. Pull together all of the dry ingredients and put them in a jar with instructions; decorate the jar and give them as gifts.

Most children love pizza. Help your children learn the finer arts to pizza making. Get the toppings your family likes on a pizza including meats, cheeses, mushrooms, onions, olives, or whatever it might be. Put all the ingredients out, along with pre-prepared crusts, or try your hand at making [homemade pizza](#); it's easier than you would think! Allow each

child to build their own pizza; be sure that an adult removes the pizzas from the oven to ensure that children aren't burned.

If you'd prefer not to let your children cook, you can still allow them the fun of creating something delicious in the kitchen. Make some homemade ice cream, allowing the children to help prepare the base. When the ice cream is ready, put together the fixings for an ice cream bar: chocolate syrup, caramel topping, whipped cream, nuts, or anything else you prefer on your sundaes. This would definitely be a welcomed finish to a hot summer day.

Are you looking for something cool and healthy this summer? Instead of ice cream sundaes, teach your children how to make [fruit smoothies](#).

Make Believe Playtime

Childhood has always been a time when children can use their imaginations. However, with technology taking over our lives, it's easier for children to turn on a television, watch a movie, or play on the computer to be entertained.; instead of using all the technology available, encourage your children to use their imaginations. You may have to start them out.

If your children are too young to go camping out in the backyard, that doesn't mean they can't enjoy the experience. Drape a sheet or blanket over a few chairs to make a tent. Allow them to pull out their sleeping bags or make one out of blankets and then step back. You may be surprised how long they'll play at their indoor camp ground.

Pirates are all the rage these days thanks to movies from Hollywood. Capitalize on that interest by helping your children move furniture so they have plenty of room for a pirate adventure. They can make islands out of couch cushions, use blankets for the ocean, and empty paper towel rolls for swords. You might even want to find a box that you can hide, complete with a treasure map to find it.

What do you do if your child doesn't like pirates? There's always outer space to spur the imagination. Find a large box that you can cut a panel out of for the spaceship, a small chair can go inside for your astronaut to sit. Put blankets over the windows to darken the room, and let the children come up with their own imaginative play.

Children have enjoyed playing like they own a store and this could be a great opportunity to encourage their use of imagination. Save back empty boxes and cans for their store, and have an old cash box with play money for the cash register. This might be a good way to sneak in some learning during the summer, especially if you play with them and help them return the correct change to their customers.

Another great imaginative activity is to allow the children to play restaurant. They can set up tables, complete with place settings, and write out a play menu. When you fix a snack, you can allow them to serve it in their restaurant. Use the same play money and box from the store for the restaurant, and they're set to go.

Crafts to Keep Children Busy

During the year, whenever you can find a great deal on art or school supplies, buy some extras to keep until summer break. These items will give your children something with which to create artistic masterpieces for your when school is out.

Finger paint is great for small children who may have trouble holding a paintbrush. Old wrapping paper makes a great place for them to paint, or you could see if your local newspaper gives away the ends of the paper rolls. They may either give them away or sell them to the public once their run is through.

Head over to your favorite search engine and insert "crafts for children." You're sure to come up with thousands, if not millions, of sites that have instructions for crafts your children can make. Find some that are within your child's skill level, or that they really want to try, and print out the instructions. You may find you have a budding artist on your hands!

One great craft your child can do, and something that will be educational as well, is to create a tree identification book. While you're at the park, or even around your own home, they can pick up leaves that have fallen. Glue them in a book, each one on its own page, and let them write down the name of the tree and something about where they found it. This may spur them to do research about the trees they find and lead them to learn about ecology.

Bugs are great fun, especially for boys. They may want to start a bug or butterfly collection. This learning activity may take up more room than a book, but it can still be quite fun and educational for them. Buy some foam board from a local art shop or discount store. Have them mark the board off into squares, the approximate size of the bugs, and let them search for the bugs. When they've caught some, you can affix them to the board. If you'd prefer the bugs to remain alive and be set free, your child can draw them and place them in a bug identification book.

If you're lucky enough to have sidewalks outside your home, or a driveway, your children may want to try their hand at making colored chalk. Again, look for instructions online. When their chalk is complete, allow them to decorate the sidewalks and driveway. It won't be permanent, but it will be colorful – until the next rain.

Ask your children to start a journal and tell them it can be about anything. They can choose what goes into it. Maybe it'll just be a diary of their summer activities. They may start writing stories, draw wonderful pictures, or they may surprise you by copying great sayings they've heard and learned. If given enough encouragement, your reluctant writer may catch the writing bug.

Before they start writing in their journal, they may want to decorate it first. Be prepared with plenty of colorful stickers, fabric paints, or items they can glue on the cover. You want this book to be uniquely theirs, and what better way for that to happen than to allow them the freedom to decorate it.

Tie-dyed clothes are popular again. Maybe your children have asked you to buy them a shirt or something. Why not teach them how to tie-dye their own? There are instructions in fabric dyes, or you can look on the internet for them. Don't be surprised, though, if once your children begin tie-dying items, they don't want to quit. Be prepared with plenty of white t-shirts to use as a blank slate. You may also want to have some fabric paints available for them to individualize their creations.

Inside the House Games

Children of all ages love to play games; purchase a few games your children will enjoy. If your children are of varying ages, buy games that everyone can play but that won't be too young for the older children.

Board games are great for teaching your children to learn to take turns. They also help them learn to count, and depending upon the game, may help their addition. Board games are also great fun for parents, so jump right in and have some fun with the kids this summer. You'll both be glad you did!

What do you do if the kids are tired of the games you have? Why don't you fall back on games you played when you were a kid? Who doesn't like a good game of "I Spy with My Little Eye?" This game doesn't require any special equipment, just a great pair of eyes and a little bit of patience. It's also a game that everyone in the family can play, and can be played anytime and anywhere.

Do you have games that have lost pieces? If you haven't tossed the game out by now, why not suggest that your children make up a new game, including rules, for the extra game pieces you have lying around? Maybe you'll need the money from one game, playing pieces from another, and a playing board from another. The options are endless if your children put their heads together and think of how they can best use the various pieces. And, you never know, your children may develop a game that has marketing potential.

Card games are generally simple to play and can be played by children of varying ages. War is a great game. All it takes is one or two decks of cards. Crazy Eights and Old Maid are games smaller children can play. Then there are card games like Uno™ or Rook™ that the older children may enjoy.

Of course, the games that don't require any pieces are the best like the good old game of Charades. You may want to join in on this game. It's a great way to spend time laughing with your children, especially if their cries of boredom are getting you down. Make sure you have plenty of room, and pull Dad into the game, too. A little bit of silliness is great fun for everyone!

Conclusion

Summer vacation doesn't have to be a source of frustration for you or your children. There are so many activities your children can do that they really don't have an excuse for being bored. Reading, playing games (both indoors and outdoors), and crafts are all things your child can do without having to resort to being stuck in front of a TV or computer monitor every day. With these ideas, perhaps you won't have to hear "Mom, I'm bored. What are we going to do this summer?"