

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Kids approach summer very differently than parents do. For kids, summer symbolizes freedom, laziness, lack of structure, and all the best vices—staying up late, sleeping in, and consuming a ridiculous amount of popsicles and ice cream cones. Parents, on the other hand, find themselves in the unenviable position of trying to be both good cop and bad cop. Yes, a summer of no responsibilities, no schedule, and a steady stream of freezer pops sounds amazing . . . until no one has clean socks, everyone is out of sorts from not getting enough sleep, gut rot has settled in, and the choruses of “I’m bored!” reach a fever pitch. So, how do we parents help our kids stay busy this summer while also giving them the freedom to relax? See what these three moms have planned.

—Nicole Balza

## HOW DO I KEEP MY KIDS BUSY THIS SUMMER?

SUMMER terrifies me.

Okay, that was a bit dramatic. Let me explain.

Sometimes it feels like there are high expectations for summer break. While I absolutely love having my kiddos back in the house, it can be a hard transition. Then right when we get used to it, they head back to school.

Over the years I have prayed for a calmer heart, a healthier dose of energy, and a creative mind when it comes to how to spend our time together. Here are some of the things my family does that may work for you as well.

- **Make a summer bucket list.** Each person gets to pick three things they want to do during summer break. In our family, someone usually puts “outdoor family movie night” on the list, while another might put “game night.” Spread all of this fun throughout the summer to help break up the lengthy days. My kids love that they get to have some say in our plans, and I love the special memories that are made.
- **Head to the library.** It’s air conditioned, free, and a great way to keep everyone reading. Who doesn’t love a good summer reading program?
- **Soak up the sun.** Go for a hike and point out God’s creation. Stay up late and marvel at the stars in the sky. Take a trip to the zoo and make fishy faces at the aquarium.
- **Open the Word of God with your family.** Read his words at the dinner table, sing his praises around the bonfire, pray shoulder to shoulder in church each weekend.

It can feel overwhelming to make the most out of summer. There might be days you just don’t have the energy. You know what? That’s okay. Some days will be a blast while others might feel like a bust, but each day will be a day that the Lord has made. Give yourself a little grace.

Enjoy the time with the people he has placed in your life. What a blessing a break can be. Happy summer!



Jen Mueller is a member at Morning Star, Jackson, Wisconsin. She and her husband, Peter, have four children, ages 7, 9, 10, and 11.

EVERY YEAR after Christmas (my other favorite time of year) ends, I am bolstered by the reminder that soon summer will be here and I will have time to sleep, read, and spend time with my family. My children are 10, 13, and 14 and quite self-sufficient. Although they are growing up, I still try to keep them busy during the summer months.

It isn’t summer for our family without signing up for our library’s summer reading program. We take at least one trip a week to the library to restock, and since my children are growing up, sometimes they bike over without me. Having access to free books along with time to read them is something that we often take for granted.

My children live near some of their closest friends, so they run over to their houses and bike together



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to different places in town. Last summer, they discovered a creek and spent days exploring, often coming home wet and happy. They've already told me how excited they are to get back there. They also walk to nearby parks or work on projects. When they were younger, they set up a museum on the front porch of our home and walked around the neighborhood inviting people to come and see their curated items. I am thankful they have the opportunity to be so creative.

Most summers we take a family vacation. We visit family in Arizona, take road trips to different parts of the country, and figure out how to be around one another for longer periods of time. During road trips we have found that creating a loose schedule helps the children with boredom and also with knowing what to expect. Things like podcasts, audiobooks, and family playlists keep everyone going when the trip starts to feel long. Since not everyone has the

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time to take a vacation, short drives to nearby places might be better. Choose a few Saturdays or Fridays off to drive to a park, ice cream shop, or splash pad. It's important to carve out a bit of extra time for learning, growing, and bonding during the summer. God has given us our children as an amazing gift, and it's a blessing that we have summer to cherish them.



*Karyn Clemons and her husband, Ben, are raising two daughters and a son in New Ulm, Minnesota. Karyn teaches at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School.*



SUMMER IS around the corner, and to say I'm excited would be a major understatement. I love that schedules relax and life slows down a bit. But while a more relaxed schedule or routine seems like a welcome reprieve from the daily grind of the school year, it can

also feel daunting and overwhelming. How do you fill the days?

I like to use the acronym BRIGHT when helping parents think through how to structure the flow of summer days in their home.

**Balance:** There should be a balance of structured (chores, classes, camps, work, and other responsibilities) and unstructured (no plans or expectations) time each day. For unstructured time, I often encourage families to create a boredom-buster list of activities children can do individually or together (bubbles, chalk art, fort building, painting, etc.) to avoid the dreaded "I'm bored!" Post this list somewhere your children can refer to when they're looking for something to do.

**Refresh:** Taking a walk, reading a book, exploring outside, journaling, gardening, or having "unplugged" time should be a part of most summer days.

**Intentional time with God:** Dedicate time each day to connect with God individually and as a family. Identify a summer Bible reading plan, pick a book of the Bible to read, or find a devotional.

**Grow:** Have each family member identify two to three personal summer growth goals. Learn a new hobby, develop a new skill, or set a book reading or fitness goal. Put a plan in place to accomplish these goals and identify time each day or week to work on them. Track and celebrate progress along the way.

**Have fun:** Be silly. Be creative. Do something that just brings you joy.

**Together:** Create a family bucket list of all the things you'd like to do together this summer. Get creative. Aim for about 15 to 20 activities. This is a manageable amount to spread across the summer without feeling overwhelmed. Post the list in a high visibility spot and keep track of your progress.

**LEARN MORE >** For a free summer family devotional, visit [thewellequippedfamily.com/summer-family-devotional](http://thewellequippedfamily.com/summer-family-devotional).



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