

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Warm-weather activities to bring your family together

With the warm weather, longer days and the shining sun finally here, everyone feels the summer spirit. It's the perfect time to venture outdoors to enjoy the warmth, the sites and a renewed bond with your family.

Below are some tips on how you and your family can make the most of the warm weather together.

Connect daily. Don't wait for special occasions to spend fun family time together. Instead, try watching the sunset or going for a long walk every day. Activities that allow for conversation help you connect, but sitting in silence on the porch watching the world go by is sometimes just as good.

Don't have a lot of time? Have a quick outdoor snack and give your complete attention to the kids as they discuss their day at school or the latest game craze. Even a few minutes will do wonders for your relationship with your kids.

Make it interesting. Be sure to get everyone's input on what they'd like to do together. Take some time to explore your children's interests and share your own. Maybe one child loves hockey, the other dinosaurs and your partner, cuisine. Spend a Saturday playing hockey outdoors, the next at the museum visiting the dinosaur exhibit and another at a farmer's market. Make it enjoyable and educational. Try to capitalize on your family's current interests and create new ones. Who knows, you might even start a new family tradition.

Become tourists in your own town. Ditch usual routines and try something new. Have a tourist attraction in your hometown? Dress up, pretend you're on vacation and experience it together. Check out adventure programs like rock climbing or day-long hiking trips. Let the kids show you how much fun skateboarding or in-line skating can be. Satisfy curiosities—libraries offer family programs, readings and book clubs.

Moving out of comfort zones will help enhance relationships and show the kids you're willing to take a risk for them. Imagine how much fun they'll have seeing you act silly or the confidence they'll feel watching you struggle to learn things just like they do.

Get moving. Bicycling is a great way to explore new parts of your community together. Many parks have challenging hiking trails to survey while getting fit. Activities that get the heart pumping will fight obesity—which has become an epidemic among North American children—and create a love for healthy activities that can last a lifetime. Check with your area's parks and recreation department for information on biking and hiking paths.

Also, your local community centre is a terrific source of information for finding activities, like sports leagues, for the whole family. Incorporating exercise into your routine after a long season indoors will get everyone's bodies healthy and minds focused.

Role reversal. If you are in an urban area, go on a day or weekend trip to the countryside. Find area attractions, festivals, exhibitions or farms to visit.

If you live in a rural area, take a trip to a larger city. Here you can explore museums, which may have

special exhibits and learning activities, and galleries with hands-on classes to encourage the artists in all of you. Don't forget to pack the car with things to do along the way and music the whole family enjoys.

Start a family journal. It's easy to spend downtime together and create a collection of summertime memories. Each week, get the kids to write down or draw pictures of their favourite activities or fun moments from the past week. Add photographs, ticket stubs or other mementos you've collected. Then, sit down and flip through the book together. It not only gives you a chance to spend quality time together, but also helps remind you of all the fun you've had together. And in 20 years, you'll have a great memento to reminisce and laugh over.

Engaging in activities together as a family can help strengthen bonds and improve daily living. When you spend the time and continue to reacquaint yourself with your family as it changes and evolves, you stay flexible and open to different interests. Expressing a little curiosity about kids' passions not only makes them feel important and included, but also gives all of you the opportunity to experience new and unexpected adventures.
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