

Don't let the snow flurries of last weekend fool you! Spring flowers are appearing and summer is around the corner. It will be here before we know it, so we should start planning now.

From September to June, many families can rely on school to provide structure and routine to their day. Younger children may be involved with preschool or day care, and many of these programs continue during the summer months. But for older (elementary, adolescent and adult) children, summer means the closure of school doors. It is the lack of that structure and routine that can make life very challenging. Although typical children might look forward to lazy days of loafing, reading or engaging in summer activities, kids with special needs are often upset and disoriented by the unstructured timetable. Typical teenagers might be engaged in summer jobs, practicing their work skills toward their eventual entry to the work force. Teens with special needs often do not have the opportunity for summer jobs, let alone the chance to practice job skills. How can we fill in the time?

Establish a plan.

Sit down with a calendar and fill in any appointments or prescheduled activities. If you have a summer vacation booked, fill that in. Once you have all the scheduled activities blocked off, you can see what time is left.

Develop structure in your day. If your child is attending a program outside of the home, that will give some routine to the day. If your child is staying home with you, try to plan the day with a few routine activities so there is some stability and predictability for your family. Maybe you will choose to bowl every Friday morning, or swim on Tuesdays. Make sure if you plan a routine that you stick to is as much as you can.

You may have several other options to consider.

What are your summer options?

1. Summer Day Camps

Summer Day Camps are popular programs for all children and youth to engage in. Your local recreation program will offer programs for the local community. Most recreation programs have an inclusion policy and will try to work with you to support your child in a program. However, they need to see you as soon as possible to assess your child's needs, look at the program offered and determine how to properly include your child. So don't hesitate - make an appointment with your local Rec Program manager and let them know about your child and his/her strengths and needs.

Other community programming such as the YM/YWCA or the Boys and Girls Clubs may have summer camp programs. Speak to the manager about their inclusion policy and if it is a good fit for your child.

Some day cares offer special summer programming for kids aged 6 - 12. They may also have an inclusion policy and would accept your child into the program. Always offer to work with a program to help support their inclusion policy.

Some disability specific organizations have developed their own Summer Day Camps for their particular special needs population. Contact your local support group or the Recreation Therapy program at the IWK <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/index.cfm?objectID=7D7C1E4D-B12C-7E9B-598F83080DEA49E2> to see if there is a specialized camp which would suit your child's needs.

Take Note:

If you receive respite funding from the Direct Family Support Program, you may be able to receive additional summer respite funding. Ask your case worker for details.

2. Theme Day Camps

Is your child interested in butterflies or dinosaurs or drawing? Museums and art galleries offer summer programming which your child may be able to participate in. Call and ask about these opportunities and whether your child might be able to attend.

3. Sleep Away Camp

In Nova Scotia, the Abilities Foundation runs Camp Tidnish, a residential camp program. Campers can attend for a 7-day period and enjoy typical camp activities such as swimming, boating, campfires and great food. Children, youth and adults are welcome as campers. For more information, go to <http://www.abilitiesfoundation.ns.ca/AbsPage.aspx?siteid=1&lang=1&id=1106> or call Heather MacDonald 902-453-6000 Ex. 227

4. Camp Mom

If there isn't an available program in your community or one that suits your family member's needs, you may want to create and develop your own summer program. This can be done either on your own or with staff you hire to involve your child in summer activities.

If you hire someone to work with your child, be sure to instruct and train them in the particular needs of your child and develop a plan for the day. The activities do not always have to be outside of the home – there are many activities and skills which can be worked on at home. Engage in an art activity, or practice cooking skills while making something fun to eat. Make sure there are a variety of activities to keep everyone interested and involved.

You may choose to plan your own activities within a family, or with several families. There are pros to this – your child will be with someone who understands his/her strengths and challenges, and this could be a time to work on skills your child may need to develop. There are also some cons – too much togetherness might not be the best thing. You also need time for yourself – respite is for all the family members to have a break. If you are programming every minute of the summer, you may not get the break that you need. Perhaps you want to plan one activity a day or every other day so it does not seem too overwhelming. If several families plan together, the organization and caring responsibilities would be shared.

An excellent example of one mother's approach to Camp Mom can be found at this website <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialneedssummercamps/tp/campmom.htm>

For the next few weeks the Family Caregivers Weekly will be focusing on summer. If you have any ideas you wish to share, please contact us.

Next week's article: Choosing a Summer Camp Program

Comments? [Talk to us!](#)

See you next week!

The Nova Scotia Partnership on Respite, Family Health, and Well-Being is made up of:

Autism Society of Nova Scotia;
Caregivers Nova Scotia Association;
Central Region Respite Society;
Halifax Association for Community Living
IWK Health Centre – Autism Research Centre
IWK Health Centre – Children's Health Program;

IWK Health Centre – Social Work;
Northern Region Respite Services;
Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women;
Nova Scotia Association for Community Living;
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services (Services for Persons with Disabilities);
Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission;
Progress Centre for Early Intervention;
Society for the Treatment of Autism;
Spina Bifida Association; and
Yarmouth Association for Community Residential Options (YACRO).

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