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It's summer! So why are those kids still inside?

How do you get kids off the couch and away from computers, video games and TV?

Parents' advice

I plan something for every day in the summer: a museum, the lake, a public pool, a walk through an interesting neighborhood, the skateboard park, a simple visit to the local park. As long as my kids play outside two to three hours a day and read for a bit and do a chore or two, I don't really care if they spend the rest of the day playing video games or watching TV.

— Sharon Brinkman

One of the hardest things for parents to understand is that kids need and actually want some structure. Sit the child down and say that you are setting up the summer rules and you want input. Tell him/her that the video games can be played for "x" amount of time each day and what time frame does he/she want to help set? Discuss options for what might be done at the other times, reminding that summer is a special time to do other free things that they can't do during the school year.

— Verna Schmidt

Use the barter system: For every hour they spend outside, they get 20 minutes of video game time. Yes, I know it doesn't exactly seem fair, but summer comes but once a year, and there will be plenty of time inside during the winter.

— Marie Grass Amenta

Expert advice

During their childhood, Barbara Tulipane's two sons loved video games, which wouldn't immediately qualify them as poster children for her work as CEO of the National Recreation and Park Association.

Despite her job, Tulipane never banned video games. "As soon as you forbid it, it becomes forbidden fruit with kids," she said.

Nor did she allow them to play without limits, even though, as she pointed out, "I was a single parent; it would have been easy to sit them in front of the TV to keep them occupied."

Instead, they were allowed to choose an hour of video games or TV a day — after chores/studies/outdoor activities were done. "They could break it up — a half-hour of TV and a half-hour of games. It would put the responsibility on them."

She walked the talk: "You can't bark at your kids to get outdoors if you're not outdoors."

Still, they often dragged their feet when she would roust them to walk or hike with her. "There were times they didn't like me," she said.

She took them from their Virginia home to Montana for a hiking trip. "Once we got out there, and I put my foot down, they finally got into it," she said.

As typical kids, they didn't say much about it afterward.

Six years later, that one son was planning his college applications. "He said he knew where he wanted to go: Bozeman," she said. "He said he wanted the beauty of Montana and the parks out there. I had no idea."

He just graduated with a degree in sociology and now works in sales. Her other son just graduated from law school.

"I'm happy to report that there is life after video games," she said.

Compiled by Wendy Donahue, Tribune Newspapers

Got a solution?

How much structure does a half-day preschooler need in the summer in order to be ready for full-day kindergarten in the fall?

Fighting bully behavior (when the bully is yours)

By Heidi Stevens
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Whether you receive a phone call from the teacher or witness one too many well-executed shoves on the playground, the moment you discover your child could be a bully is not a happy one. But a young child who shows signs of aggression is not destined to be the schoolyard toughie. We talked to some experts about signs to look for, how to address them and when to call on a professional.

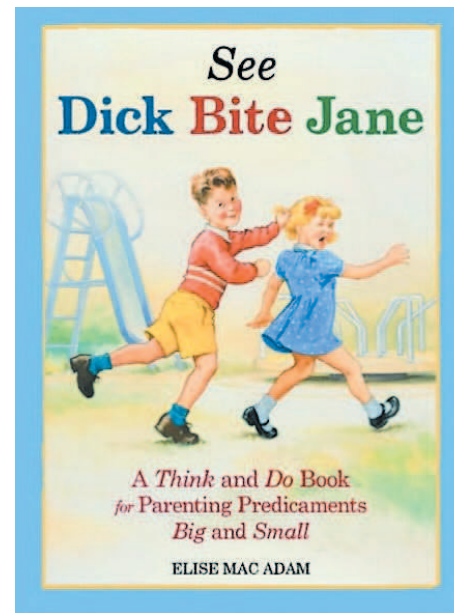
It could be a phase. "Research shows that physical aggression peaks between the ages of 2 and 4," says Erika Carpenter Rich, a Los Angeles-based clinical psychologist who runs social skills workshops for children. "Physical aggression during the preschool period and even into kindergarten does not necessarily mean your child will be a bully. Of those kids who are physically aggressive, about half will get better."

React quickly. Address your child's behavior the moment you discover it. "For young children, consequences that are experienced after the fact are not very effective," Rich says. "A young child's aggression is usually done impulsively, rather than as a premeditated act. It is important to attempt to discover your child's motivation and reason for lashing out and to deliver immediate and effective consequences for the act — a timeout, removal of desired toys or activities."

And it doesn't hurt to offer an apology on your child's behalf. "To diffuse your own discomfort socially, you need to apologize," says Elise Mac Adam, author of "See Dick Bite Jane: A Think and Do Book for Parenting Predicaments Big and Small" (Adams Media). "It can be very hard to admit out loud that your child is having a problem, but once you prove that you're trying to nip it in the bud, that goes a very long way."

React appropriately. "This is a chance to explain to your child why hitting or biting is wrong," Rich says. "Saying, for example, that it hurts the other person and then they won't want to play with you anymore is a developmentally appropriate explanation."

Your reaction should never be physical, Rich emphasizes. "Never hit or bite your child to show him what it's like. This only promotes further aggression. Children who are spanked or witness aggression in the home are more likely to be aggressive toward others. It's a learned response."



It can be hard to admit to others that your child has a problem, says Elise Mac Adam, author of "See Dick Bite Jane."

Consider the context. Do a little reconnaissance to determine a possible cause. "One of the most common reasons a child is aggressive in the preschool period is a mismatch in language skills," says Rich. "Either your child is less verbal than the other children and is communicating her frustration through physical means, or your child is more verbal than the other children and uses aggression to get his point across where words have failed. Another reason could be that your child has a true social skills deficit — meaning that he just doesn't know what to do when he is frustrated. Some kids just naturally figure it out and others don't."

Assess the environment as well, Rich says. "Are there a lot of kids in a small space? Are there enough adults to intervene and promote pro-social behavior? Are there enough toys to go around?"

Call on a professional. "If the teacher is concerned, then you should be too," says Rich. "A seasoned teacher has the benefit not just of comparing your child to his current classmates, but to all the children she has taught over the years. Also, once a pattern of aggressive behavior emerges, it's time to get help. Thinking that 'boys will be boys' or 'she'll grow out of it' could end up wasting valuable time. The earlier a professional can intervene on these behaviors, the more successful the outcome."

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