

NEWSLETTER

WebParentTip: Volume 10, # 6 for June 3, 2009

KEEPING KIDS BUSY

If I were designing a school system for today's children I would not have a three month summer vacation. When most of us lived on the family farm all the school kids were needed for the summer harvest. Not true today.

Children need some down time...time to daydream and play by themselves or with friends...but they also need to keep busy so they won't get bored. Three months is a long time to be bored. That can be a challenge for young children because learning to self-entertain takes a while (and some grownups still haven't mastered it).

These days children may not learn to self-entertain because they are entertained by TV or video games. But this is very different. Time spent in front of the screen is time somebody else decides what you see or do. Even interactive stuff like games derive from somebody else's head not your own.

Parents can suggest projects for older children but the younger ones have to be enticed into a project. An example is gardening. To say to a seven-year old, "Why don't you start a garden." won't work. But if you bring home the seeds and a few small size garden tools AND start the garden with the child present most kids are intrigued. They rush out in the morning to see if the radishes have come up yet. Make the child responsible for watering and weeding. Only a small plot because kids have small hands.

Older children should be gently steered into hobbies like collections, photography, crafts. The steering is done by the parents but the direction is based on what the child likes and what talents have shown up.

Doing chores for neighbors (Is there a dog that needs walking? A lawn that needs mowing?) keeps older kids busy and enables children too young for a job to make a bit of money and feel competent about themselves (I am responsible) while preventing boredom.

Assigning a BIG chore like cleaning the garage or painting the house helps the older child add to the college fund and feel responsible.

A little boredom is OK as it motivates children to figure out how to self-entertain but a whole summer of boredom is a big waste of a child's learning years.