

### Summertime and the Parenting is ....Complicated

For many of us the school year is densely packed with activities and commitments and we spend much of the year looking forward to the summer months. We anticipate that things will slow down a bit and we will have more relaxed time with our children. There may be a week or two off from work, and we may have a family vacation planned. Ah, summertime. A long-awaited time to play, chat and simply be with our children and teenagers.

Well, guess what. By the time August arrives, parents are sounding ready for the school year to begin. Some have been upset by their children's behavior or lack of respect, lack of consideration or an absence of a spirit of cooperation. Other parents have been saddened by their own weak moments parenting. What happened? How can we spend the entire school year looking forward to something that turns out to be more challenging than we expected?

First, there are the obvious stressors. Instead of waking up and rushing to get out the door on time to get the children to school, we may be stressed by how late they sleep in or perhaps by their tendency to wake up early and plant themselves in front of a TV or computer screen. And we now have many more hours each day to plan. If we plan too-full of a day we might have meltdowns and over-stimulated children and if we allow too much free time our children may act out and complain about being bored. There may be conversations between our children and their friends that typically happen outside of our hearing and we may hear things that concern us. Family vacations usually require car trips or plane rides. And when we get where we are heading, there may be family members who feel comfortable giving us feedback about how we are doing as parents.

Summertime and the parenting is complicated. If we are spending more time with our children we may be spending less time with people who think highly of us, build us up and provide

a boost to our energy and confidence levels. We may have routines during the school year that go away during the summer months. Maybe we meet a friend for lunch or racquetball, maybe we are part of a book club or a volunteer organization, and maybe even our workplace provides us with some esteem-building moments. And when we are with co-workers or friends we are temporarily not wearing our parent hats. And it is important for us to have the opportunity to take off our parent hat periodically and be our non-parent self. Many parents have shared that they return to parenting with greater perspective and calmness after some time at work or with friends. The breaks from our children are needed during the summer even though we have too little time with them during the school year.

Is it possible that we have inadvertently created families that have too much stress during the school year because we are over-committed and too much stress during the summer because we do not allow ourselves sufficient breaks from our children? And is it possible that we do not feel comfortable with our need for breaks from our children?

What brought this issue to mind was a series of meetings with parents who sounded trapped. They talked about feeling disappointed with how the summer was going and sounded torn between wanting to blame their children and wanting to blame themselves. When the conversation inched towards their own personal needs and how they might be able to make plans to better meet those needs, there seemed to be a barrier to admitting that they had needs that could only be met by breaks from their children.

I would love to hear from you ([stevekahn@comcast.net](mailto:stevekahn@comcast.net)) on this issue of needing breaks from our children in order to be able to parent insightfully when we are with them. My wish for all parents is that they feel free to be less busy during the school year and feel free to find a way to schedule what they need for themselves during the summer months.

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