



Family matters



Parenting column by Sasha Brown, family care manager at Community Family Care, Staunton

Make summer work for you all

WITH the summer holidays fast approaching, many parents will be starting to think about how to entertain the children and keep the chaos under control.

The holidays can be a stressful time with everyone home and it can be hard to juggle the things you usually do when the children are at school.

We've put together some tips for encouraging children to help with tasks so that you don't feel frazzled trying to keep on top of things over the summer.

Having children help out also means there is more time for family activities and important down-time for parents at the end of the day.

Plan ahead

Talk to your children about helping out over the summer holidays. You may want to sit down as a family and decide on a jobs list that is reasonable and realistic for your children given their ages and within their limits. Only choose jobs that are safe for them to complete.

Let each child pick two or three jobs each they are going to take responsibility for and explain why helping is important. If children cannot decide on their own jobs, pick them for them.

Finalise a jobs list for each child. You may want to get them to draw this up in a timetable to put up somewhere.

You may want to show your child how to complete their jobs and support them with completing them initially.

Agree on a set day or time for jobs to be completed and explain to your child that you will be checking they have been done.

Rewards

Common rewards for completing tasks include pocket money.

Rewards could be anything from earning spending money for a family trip, to earning the family trip or extra one on one time with mum/dad.

Rewards do not need to be expensive.

Consequences

Agree some consequences with your child ahead of time. If a child does not want to help out and complete their tasks then remind them of the agreed consequence and make sure you follow through in implementing it.

For example, removing a privilege or reminding your child that they will not be earning the reward that day.

Review

Remember to review your child's progress with them and support them to make changes.

Review if your child is realistically able to complete their tasks.

Remember to provide your children with lots of praise for completing tasks as this will encourage them to continue.

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HAPPY holidays are here again...

Taking the kids on holiday doesn't always spell relaxation and down-time for parents - but a bit of prep and planning can ensure everybody has a good time. **LISA SALMON** quizzes the experts

IT'S nearly time for many families to escape the miserable British weather and jet off to sunnier climes. But for a lot of parents, a sunshine break brings the same childcare and child entertainment responsibilities they have at home - and that doesn't make for holiday relaxation.

However, plan your holiday well and take the right equipment and toys, and the whole family can have a great holiday, promising travel and parenting experts.

Here are their top tips for happy holidays with the kids...

TRAVELLING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DEBI GREEN, founder of babygoes2.com, suggests:

- Take a holiday pack for toddlers of small activity items to dish out during your journey and the holiday itself. This could include a colouring book and crayons, puzzles, small toys like finger puppets, a picture or story book, and a scrapbook to put their memories from the trip in.
- Introduce a fixed and regular quiet time when young children always come out of the sun and concentrate on an activity from

their holiday pack, and possibly have a nap. Make a communal 'holiday chill area' in the shade, using lilos, towels, and pillows.

- Take children on a short treasure hunt and make a seaside or countryside sculpture from what they've collected.
- Take a holiday pack for toddlers of small activity items to dish out during your journey and the holiday itself.
- If staying in a villa, pack a small paddling pool - fun for babies and tiny tots, and easy to monitor from your sun lounger.
- Organise a mini pool Olympics, which can be as simple as jumping in the pool, swimming to a rubber ring and picking up something from the pool floor, all timed.
- Encourage slightly older



If you're jetting off to warmer climes this summer, plan well by taking the right kit - and toys! - and the whole family will enjoy the holiday



Having games or activities for the kids can help stop them becoming bored



Catherine Cooper, author of Travelling With Children: A Parent's Guide, below

children to compile a holiday diary or scrapbook, or an online photo album.

CATER FOR SUCCESS

CATHERINE COOPER (catherinecooper.net), author of Travelling With Children: A Parent's Guide (Need 2 Know, £9.99), suggests families with young children opt for self-catering accommodation if possible.

"You can prepare meals when you want, put them down for a nap when you want and sit outside and have a glass of wine while they sleep," she points out.

Catherine also believes kids' clubs are a "godsend", although she advises parents ask questions such as: What's the children-to-adult ratio? What are the opening times? How are age groups split?



Debi Green, founder of travel website babygoes2.com

She adds: "You probably won't want to send them off for the whole week, but a few mornings or afternoons here and there will give you time to relax, and them time to make new friends - and often try out some amazing activities."



Mumsnet editor Kate Williams

KEEP TEENS ENGAGED

DEBI warns that when it comes to holidaying with teenagers, it's "slightly more tricky, since boredom looms a little larger on their horizon".

- If possible, choose a holiday with an element of independence - perhaps they can walk to a nearby shop or the beach on their own.
- Give them their own space, perhaps a den or an area around the pool for chilling.
- Plan to fend off boredom - days with a good mix of chilling and active periods work well.

GROWN-UP TIME

PARENTS have to make time for themselves too - it is everyone's holiday after all. Debi suggests that you:

- Remove obvious hazards that will thwart relaxation; choose gated pools

for non-swimmers, enclosed gardens, no high balconies or outside staircases.

- Consider holidaying with friends or family so you can take turns to supervise, and so the children have playmates.
- Hire a babysitter or nanny for a few hours as often as you can afford it. Debi explains: "Children are relaxed because parents are still on site, but parents can relax because the nanny is taking the responsibility of monitoring."
- Some resorts offer a 'babe watch' service, where they'll briefly look after babies and toddlers in a shady area on the beach while parents have a stroll/swim.
- Choose sun loungers close to the children's pool or beach so you can easily watch the kids from a comfortable position, and also choose a room where you can relax outside while babies and younger children nap.

BE REALISTIC

"HOLIDAYS with children are not the same as romantic couples getaways or trips with friends," warns Mumsnet editor Kate Williams. "The best way to truly enjoy holidays with young children is to be realistic about what's likely to make them reasonably content."

"For all but the most adventurous, this probably involves food your children will eat, a temperate climate, comfortable sleeping arrangements, a reasonable travel time and plenty of outdoorsy possibilities - in the hope that an early night for them means a couple of hours off for you."

THREE OF THE BEST... HOLIDAY COVER-UPS

PARADISO MINI-ME HOODED PONCHO
Ideal for covering up youngsters on the beach, this hooded poncho is made from super-absorbent cotton towelling with a velour top, and features a flamingo design. Suitable for ages 3-10 (£48, youmeandthedream.com).

MONET ILLUSTRATED SUN HAT
Cotton sun hat featuring brightly coloured floral illustrations by artist Claude Monet. Matching items available. Suitable for ages 4-8 (£5, shop.royalacademy.org.uk).

ANGEL'S FACE RASH TOP
A girl's top with SPF 50+ protection designed to be worn in the water, it features frills on the shoulders, and a wings design on the back. Available in sizes for ages 1-2 up to teens (from £34, angels-face.co.uk).



PUZZLES WORD GAMES LOOPY

REAL OR LOOPY

ONLY FIVE OF THESE TEN NAMES ARE REAL SPECIES OF DINOSAUR. THE OTHER FIVE ARE FALSE. DO YOU KNOW WHICH IS WHICH?

TROODON DYNAMICUS SALTASAURUS
PEPPERONIMUS DIPLODOCUS
LITTELTALODON GRUNTASAURUS TATISAURUS
CARRYONAMUS BAGACERATOPS

Answers: Real Dinosaur: TROODON, DIPLODOCUS, SALTASAURUS. False: DYNAMICUS, PEPPERONIMUS, LITTELTALODON, GRUNTASAURUS, TATISAURUS, CARRYONAMUS, BAGACERATOPS.

PUZZLES WORD GAMES

Aladdin

I AM THE GENIE OF THE LAMP. CAN YOU SOLVE THIS RIDDLE?
EACH LINE OF THIS VERSE IS A CLUE TO A LETTER, WHICH WILL SPELL A FIVE LETTER WORD

MY FIRST IS IN CREAM, BUT NOT IN MILK.
MY SECOND IS IN CLOTH, AND ALSO IN SILK.
MY THIRD IS IN DOE, BUT NOT IN DEER.
MY FOURTH IS IN WEEK, BUT NOT IN YEAR.
MY LAST IS IN FUNDS, AND ALSO IN MONEY.
I DO THE SILLIEST THINGS JUST TO BE FUNNY.

Answers: Riddle: CLOWN



JANE COSTELLO

WITH the end of term looming, it's school report time for many of us.

I've noticed that interpreting the labels teachers are asked to use these days has become far from straightforward.

Until this year, we'd always received reports littered with more numbers and letters than a tin of Alphabeti Spaghetti. They might have been a 2C or 1A in English, but a 3A or 2B in maths.

This peculiar coding system was something we parents were expected to just KNOW, presumably by the power of some telepathic force sent directly from the Education Secretary's office.

Either that, or we had to go

I'd get an F when it comes to

away and do some detective work on Mumsnet.

This time round, the letters and numbers have disappeared, in favour of a series of words that are so diplomatic that they could've been written by a PR executive. Your child's ability is now 'developing', or 'secure' or 'expected'.

Make of those words what you will. Nowhere does anyone explicitly say whether your child's grasp of literacy or numeracy is average, above average, below average or crack-open-the-gin-it's-catastrophic.

You've got to work it out for

yourself by interpreting this nice, fluffy terminology.

These words might sound vague and touchy-feely, but they're anything but.

Schools are still testing children until it's coming out of their ears. The only difference now is that the results are being given 'nicer' (and I'd say more nebulous) names.

I should stress that I completely approve of the idea that children shouldn't be discouraged by anything written in a school report.

In the olden days (LONG before I was a child, ahem) teachers' approach to writing a

understanding kids' school reports

report was about as subtle as a sledgehammer.

If any of us received a report dismissing our child as a 'nuisance' or 'hopeless and certainly on the road to failure' - as was fairly standard in the 1950s - parents these days would probably have a lot to say about it.

I'm glad we're all a little generous with our praise these days - and honestly believe that positive encouragement beats negativity in all aspects of raising kids (anyone who's ever bought a reward chart and seen the lengths they'll go to for a single sticker would vouch for that).

But positivity shouldn't be at the expense of writing something that everyone understands.

I fear there will be some parents who've been left with the impression that their child could be the next Governor of the Bank of England when they still haven't mastered their seven times table.

In which case, a bit of straight talking would be no bad thing.

Jane's latest novel, **Summer Nights at the Moonlight Hotel**, is out now.



Encouraging our kids beats being negative