

SUMMERTIME – Not so Easy for Single Parents

By Radha Selvester - CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services

“Summertime – and the livin’ is easy” is an oxymoron for single parents. Summertime is when free childcare and transportation (in the form of school and buses) goes away. Single parents have to juggle work responsibilities, finding appropriate child care, and transportation for 10 weeks. The kids want to feel like they are on vacation while parents may be feeling like they are doing double duty.

Some stress is relieved because there isn’t any homework or testing over the summer. But parents still need to get their children to bed early (in spite of the fact that it’s still light out until almost 9 pm) so their children can get up and be ready to leave when parents need to get to work. Most working parents have more to juggle in terms of childcare over the summer, but lower-income single parents with more than one child tend to have the biggest struggles.

Here are a few ideas that may help.

- Plan ahead – some summer programs offer scholarships or subsidies – apply for whatever you are eligible for – and even if the desired specialty camp doesn’t advertise subsidies, ask if there are any early bird or sibling/friend discounts available.
- Cash in favors – if you have family or friends willing to take care of your children for a few days or weeks, locally or out of town, go for it! It will be a vacation for you as well as for the kids.
- Co-op with other parents – five parents can take turns watching all the children one day per week so the other four days they can work – some employers might be OK with adjusting your schedule to make this successful. It’s worth asking.
- Consider live-in help – maybe there is an older teen or young adult willing to do childcare in your home in exchange for room and board – maybe there’s a northern relative who would like to spend a couple weeks in Florida – or a college student? It’s a lot easier to get to work on time if you don’t have to get the kids dressed and fed and ready, too.
- Vacation if you can – it’s hard to save up any vacation time when you’re parenting, but if you can use some over the summer, it can be a great time to reconnect with your children. Even a staycation – sleeping in your own home but planning kid-focused activities each day – can be refreshing.

The good news is that it won’t be long before your children won’t need child care anymore. They’ll be working or apprenticing or traveling over the summer and before you know it they’ll be moved onto independent adult lives. Parenting is one of those jobs where the goal is to work yourself out of the job.

So try to enjoy each stage as you go along. Toys under foot, sibling rivalry, carpooling, childcare expenses, noise, mess, and chaos, are just stages and believe it or not you will eventually miss these times - at least a little bit.

Summer is a great time to help kids who are struggling make changes in their attitude and behavior. There is no charge for Family Action Counseling for kids age 6-17. CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services 352 244 0628 x3822 www.cdsfl.org