

If summer is stressful, plan now to slow down

I'm getting more tense as summer approaches. When our family gets out of its normal routine, it seems like we get busier than ever. Any guidance?

First, it might help to realize that you're not alone. Even though summertime often evokes thoughts of a never-ending stream of sunny days, barbeques and swimming parties, the reality is that it's often a stressful time. In fact, the National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests that most working families struggle to balance the demands of adult work schedules during the summer while providing safe activities for children — and the result is a hectic schedule full of stress.

If that sounds familiar, there are things you can do to reduce stress:

- Do what you can to avoid overscheduling. Remember: Free play is an important part of childhood development, but a 2007 clinical report in the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* expressed concern that many children don't get enough of it. The academy suggests that a large proportion of play should be child-driven instead of adult-directed.

Think of things you used to do as a kid that you really enjoyed — building forts (whether under clothesline or on top of the couch), playing tag or hide-and-seek, or getting the other kids together for a game of kickball. All are examples of unstructured play that can stimulate the imagination and release pent-up energy. As long as children are in a safe environment, they don't need to be scheduled 24/7.

- Understand that even vacations can cause



stress. Taking time off work often means working extra hours beforehand or afterwards to catch up. And when co-workers are out, it often means you must take up some slack. In addition, the time and energy spent making vacation plans, plus dealing with unanticipated events during vacation, can be silent stressors you may have trouble recognizing. To help, do what you can to plan ahead and try to be as flexible as possible. And be sure to take time to actually relax when you're on vacation. Not every minute has to be planned. Leave time to lie on the beach or play card games around the table.

- Accept that you probably will experience some stress this summer. How you deal with it is key. The American Psychological Association suggests thinking about how you experience stress and identifying situations that trigger stressful feelings.

Once you understand your triggers, evaluate how you usually react. People often make unhealthy choices — overindulging in “comfort” foods, losing sleep, or foregoing personal time. Instead, try finding healthy ways to de-stress. Take a short walk, enjoy a fresh tomato from the garden, or read a chapter in a good book. And, the APA says, don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it. Friends and family can often step up to the plate when you need them — but first, you have to ask.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Amanda Westfall, program assistant in parent education for Ohio State University Extension in Washington County.

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