Summer fun

During the summer months, children have lots of unstructured time and parents or grandparents may have more time to spend with children. Adults can enhance children's development while building a store of great memories by planning fun and stimulating summer activities. Here are some ideas that don't cost much money. The key ingredient is an adult who is willing to spend TIME with children.

- **Turn off the TV, video games and computers!** The average child spends more than 21 hours each week watching TV. Children need interactions with other people to develop social skills. Summer is a great time to hang out in local public parks where children can climb, slide, swim and swing. All of these physical activities promote coordination and enhanced self-esteem. All the adult has to do is watch and talk about what the child is doing.

- **Churn up a freezer of ice cream.** Any food preparation activity is an opportunity for a science lesson. What ingredients go into ice cream? How do salt and ice make it freeze? Most children also just enjoy helping prepare snacks and meals. The end result is a cool treat for a hot day.

- **Go further than food preparation — go to production.** Get the children into the garden to help see where food really comes from. It is surprising how tasty vegetables become when you grow your own.

- **Visit the library often.** Reading is a lifelong pleasure. Libraries generally have special summer programs. This is a great way to improve skills vital to school (and life) success.

- **Use summer events as a way to teach responsibility.** Have the children plan and lead the games at a family picnic. If you want to teach money skills, give them a budget for entertainment.

- **Have your older children plan dinner one night.** Give them a budget and the responsibility of planning, shopping for, preparing and cleaning up after the meal.

- **Have your children teach you something.** This is a great way for grandparents to learn about computers. It is a great self-esteem builder when children are allowed to be the experts!

- **Teach children something you want to pass on** such as recipes or a craft like knitting or woodworking.

- **Remember what you liked to do as a child and do some of those same activities with your own child.** This is a great way to build family traditions that are passed down across generations.
• **Call your local parks and recreation center** and see what activities they have available.

• **Take a swimming break.** Go to a local pool or creek. Don’t forget the sunscreen!

• **Try “water painting”** — all it takes is a bucket of water, an old paint brush and a sidewalk or porch and you have the beginnings of a masterpiece. You can even pass the time watching your creations evaporate. Drawing with sidewalk chalk on the wet pavement is also fun.

• **Take a tour around your house or the neighborhood.** Look for things you may not have noticed before or play "I spy."

• **Go for a nature walk.** Besides being good exercise, you can investigate rocks, plants, bugs, etc. Just remember to be careful around the critters — some of them view humans as a threat and will try to protect themselves!

• **Make homemade bubbles:** ¼ cup liquid dish detergent, 1 teaspoon corn syrup, and ½ cup of water. You can make bubble wands out of bent wire wrapped with yarn, a cup with the end cut out, a slotted spoon or a slotted berry basket.

• **Camp out in the backyard.** Pitch a tent, have some snacks, tell stories, play games, read books, gaze at the stars. Enjoy all types of camping activities without the hassle and expense of traveling.

• **Have a cookie baking day.** This is the perfect activity for a rainy summer day. Put some in the freezer to enjoy later or take some around to share with the neighbors.

• **Look through and/or organize photos.** Share stories and reflect on the past with your kids. Organize the photos into an album or scrapbook.

• **Check out your local University Extension office** for program schedules and resources for youth and families.