One-way holiday: when the kids are on vacation and you’re not

The end of the school year is an exciting time for kids looking forward to long, fun-filled summer days. But for working parents, the summer can be a juggling act as they seek care for younger children, shuttle kids to summer programs or day camps and try to fit in some time together as a family.



But even though you might not be there, you don't have to miss out on the kids’ vacation or their fun. Make the ordinary extraordinary and turn down time into family time this summer by sharing the following activities with your kids.

Make your way to a farmer’s market. Have kids that are up at the crack of dawn? Lots of local farmer’s markets are open early enough that you’ll have plenty of time to explore the different scents, sounds and colours well before you have to head off to work. It’s a great chance to teach kids about home-grown food and show them how to pick out a fresh watermelon or order cheese by the gram or ounce. Besides getting your grocery shopping done, you’ll also support the local economy, help the environment and spend quality time together.

Home cooking. You don't need to be a trained chef to gain a captive audience in the kitchen. Make meal time a fun time for your children by getting them involved with cooking dinner. Put your kids to work beating eggs or measuring out ingredients. Pizza is an especially hands-on meal for kids and even teenagers: it’s fun to stretch the dough and create a mini masterpiece.

Pick your own. Grab a hat and some sun block on the weekend and head out to the local fruit farm for a "pick your own" experience. Have a competition to find the smallest or the largest strawberry, or a race to see who can fill their basket the quickest. Some fruit farms also have animals or hay rides. Find out what is offered in your area and enjoy the sunshine while providing your kids with an outdoor experience.

Camp in. Though you might not have time to head up to the cottage or Provincial Park, you can turn your backyard into an exciting wilderness adventure. Set up tents and roast marshmallows over a camp stove if you can't have an open fire. Let your kids stay up late and become a kid yourself: make shadow animals, tell 'scary' stories and let your imaginations run wild.

Tour your town over the weekend. Are people visiting your town for attractions you've never seen yourself? You don't have to go the distance when it comes to sightseeing this summer. Whether it’s a local gallery, a park or a historical landmark, chances are your own town has something to offer the curious tourist that, as a local, you've taken for granted. Go on your town's website or find a travel brochure and take your kids on an adventure in their own neighbourhood on the weekend and evenings rather than fighting traffic. You’ll get more time together, save money by staying local and give your kids a better appreciation of their own community.

Learn at the library. Make a solitary activity a family one by picking out books together at the local library. And most libraries offer more than book lending. Book signings and family activities are on many library summer calendars. Get your library card and have fun while encouraging your kids to read over their summer vacation.

Catch a movie. There are fewer to be found, but going to a drive-in theatre can be a special summer evening experience for kids. You can bring your own snacks and you don't have to worry about keeping your kids quiet. As an added bonus, many drive-ins have more than one showing, so smaller kids can fall asleep after the first movie, leaving the rest of the evening a date night for mom and dad.

Gardening. Get your hands dirty on bright summer mornings or evenings by tending a vegetable or flower garden with your family. Include your kids from the beginning. If it’s a flower garden, take your kids with you to pick out the flowers. Let them choose one in their favourite colour to contribute and take

responsibility for tending. If it’s a vegetable garden, have your kids pick a vegetable to plant and tend. Then everyone can spend a set time a few times a week in the garden, helping it to grow, and reaping the delicious and beautiful rewards!

Walk the dog. Having a pet can be hard work, but why not make it a fun morning or evening activity that gets your family moving and outside during the warmer summer weather. Walk your dog to the park, play catch or go off the beaten path by taking a trail nearby. Your whole family, including your dog, will benefit from the exercise and you'll have quality time to talk with each other and enjoy the outdoors.

Kids are full of expectation when they look towards their summer vacation. It's free time for fun and play with friends and family. But it can be hard for parents whose schedules don't change to find the time to be a part of the fun and play. By revamping everyday activities and trying some new ones, you can make the most of your time at home. You may also discover that your kids aren't the only ones having more fun this summer.