

Solutions

ISSUE 5

FAMILY SERVICES EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

As the days lengthen, temperatures rise, and classes break for the summer, parents across Canada pack up their bags, their cars, and the kids, and the great Family Vacation begins! Away from the everyday pressures of work, free to spend some quality time with your children, a whole list of exciting things to do, places to see—it sounds ideal. Maybe not. Anyone who has ever traveled with children knows just how quickly the experience can turn from a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with your family, to a fight for your own sanity. The kids get bored, or tired, and you spend most of your time playing peacekeeper and baggage handler. You finish each day exhausted. Thankfully, most of the conditions that can cause stress during a family vacation can also be prevented with some careful planning. The following tips are just a few of the ways that you can help ensure this year's rest and relaxation with the family is just that.

If you plan on vacationing with a child, plan your destinations and activities as if you were that child.

Think not only about what your child *likes* to do, but what they *can* do considering their age and capabilities. A toddler just learning to walk will not want to be strapped into a stroller all afternoon but is not able to walk a long way on their own. A teenager whose curfew has just been extended will probably not appreciate a trip to a place that rolls up the streets at 6:00 p.m.

Involve the whole family...in the planning.

If your child doesn't like your suggestions, ask them for theirs. If you will be travelling with

Stress-Free Family Vacations

teenagers, try giving them each a day where they are responsible for the entire family's itinerary. **And in the packing.** Using the "If you pack it, you carry it!" guideline for even the youngest of your children will help limit your total baggage count. **And in the recording.** A disposable camera is an inexpensive way to allow your child to become the official trip photographer, or give each child a small budget and a scrapbook where they can collect special items from each stop along the way.

Know your destination and prepare your children for what to expect.

Tell and if possible show your children what will be different where you are going—food, clothing, where you'll be sleeping each night, weather,

crowds, animals, safety issues, etc., well in advance of your trip. Books or videos are

especially helpful and you may want to visit your local library or ask your travel agent for suggestions. Whenever possible, take young children on "trial runs," exposing them to environments similar to what you may find on your trip. For example, if you know you will be eating in restaurants often or fighting crowds, try eating out several times prior to your departure or touring the local mall on a busy week-end.

Schedule breaks, play time, nap time and flex time.

Relaxing the hectic work/school day schedule is a part of any vacation but young children especially will still need some sort of routine. Setting a schedule for meals, naps, play and bed time and sticking to it whenever possible even while travelling will improve both your child's temperament and yours. Long car trips are difficult for adults and children alike so be sure to schedule breaks every few hours in places where you can get out and walk around. Even on a *family* vacation, your teenagers will want some time

THINGS TO BRING ON CAR TRIPS:

- inside toys and games that won't break or make a mess if dropped or thrown
- outside games for stretch breaks, like a frisbee or a baseball and gloves
- books on tape are ideal for the younger traveler especially if you are trying to travel during nap time
- a first aid kit
- a CD player with headset is an essential if you are travelling with teenagers
- lots of drinks and snacks—especially fruits—to help avoid dehydration
- every song you ever learned as a child—sing-a-longs are a great way to put in the miles
- garbage bags

Stress-Free Family Vacations *continued*

to themselves so leave some intentional gaps in your group schedule to allow them to explore on their own.

Don't forget it's your vacation too.

Schedule some time during your trip for just you or you and your partner. Ask your travel agent or your hotel about babysitting services at your destination or consider taking your regular babysitter along for the trip. Arrange for your partner to take the kids for an afternoon while you go

golfing or sample the local shops. And be sure to bring along some of your favourite stress relievers—a book, your favourite CD—to help you unwind at the end of the day.

Web sites related to family vacations and travelling with children:

Discover Canada/Your Travel & Tourism Guide to Canada at www.discovercanada.net

“School's Out for the Summer...” from the Sympatico site's Parenting section

at www1.sympatico.ca/Contents/Home+Leisure/Parenting

“Bon Voyage, but...” from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's site at www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca

Geof Nieboer's site “Games Kids Play” includes a section on car games, www.corpcomm.net/~gnieboer/Car_Games.htm

Parks Canada's site at www.parkscanada.pch.gc.ca

Stress-Free Vacations at Home

A recent European study suggests that there may be a link between the level of workplace stress and the amount of vacation time taken.

A majority of German, Dutch and British managers who worked in excess of 50 hours per week on average and took over 30 vacation days each year reported their stress level as “manageable or low” while half of Belgian, Italian and Spanish executives working the same number of hours but taking only 24 days of vacation considered their jobs highly stressful.¹ So why does it still seem that the busier we are at work, and the more stressful the work environment, the harder it is for us to believe that a vacation reduces stress and improves our health?

Perhaps it is because our understanding of the word vacation is an extended leave of absence from the office for the purpose of travelling somewhere far from home. Perhaps it is that the stresses of completing three weeks worth of work before going, coupled with the hassles of travel planning, outweigh the perceived benefits of the vacation itself. If so, then there is a simple solution. Take your vacation,

yes by all means, but forgo the travelling afar and book a trip to the comfort of your own backyard instead. With a little organization and a few ground rules you may find a vacation at home quite rewarding, allowing you to return to work refreshed and ready to tackle the projects you left behind with renewed energy.

DOS AND DON'TS FOR VACATIONING AT HOME:

DO NOT plan a whole list of household chores that *need* to get done, like fixing the porch or getting to the bottom of the laundry basket. DO feel free to plan projects that you have *wanted* to do for some time but haven't, like planting a garden or building a deck. Just as long as it is something that you enjoy doing.

DO NOT tell the office you'll just be at home during your vacation and they can call you anytime. If you absolutely must work, including making or receiving calls to/from the office during your vacation, DO schedule a day and time that you will be unavailable to your family but available to work. Stick to it.

DO NOT hide the fact that you are going on a vacation from your clients and customers. Taking a vacation is not a weakness. DO prepare clients and customers for your departure by letting them know when and how long you'll be gone, and who will be serving their accounts during your absence. Give the same information to the office along with a list of your current projects, their status, and who you've delegated related tasks to.

DO NOT expect or accept that a week spent at home will be just like a regular work week except that you won't be going in to the office. DO plan activities that are completely different from what you would normally do during a regular weekend or weekday evening at home. Sleep in, stay up late, take a day trip to the beach, play baseball with the kids, take pottery or scuba diving lessons, anything so long as it is not something you would normally do.

And above all, DO have a great vacation!

1 Source: A summary of the 1997 UPS Europe Business Monitor, an annual survey of 1,500 European executives in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the U.K.

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