

# Better Parenting: Free and Fun Things to do With Your Kids This Summer

By Sonia Spackman

We can have family fun without leaving Vernonia, our houses or our back yards. This article is similar to the one printed last June. It was written to help parents create fond memories for kids without spending lots of money! We can show our kids and grandkids we care by taking the time to do special activities with them.

**1. Sleepover movie night.** Move your mattresses in the living room for a fun family sleepover night. The kids will love mom and dad joining the fun. Make popcorn, and watch a funny movie. *Or better yet, watch family movies.*

**2. Backwards day.** Reverse everything to create your own backwards day. Have breakfast for dinner and dinner for breakfast; put your clothes on backwards, watch a movie first thing in the morning and cartoons in the evening. *Have the kids help with the planning and enjoy the ideas they come up with.*

**3. Treasure hunts.** This can be as big or small as you wish. Ask the kids to find something "purple" and as soon as they find it, ask for something else. At the end give a little treat or reward. To make it bigger, give them a list of things you have hidden and let them go. *Or, you can hide written clues inside and outside of the house to find a bigger prize.*

**4. Eat like a pig.** Kids love a mess. So break the rules one night and have a dessert-eating contest with one rule: **no hands**, any excuse to eat without silverware can be funny.

**5. Culture and Dinner Night.** This is a great way to get kids to try new foods, and learn about other cultures, even from your family roots. For example, get them involved cooking Greek food, play Greek music, watch the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". Have each member of the family look up one fact about that country *and have fun with it.*

**6. House Campout & Flashlight Fun.** Grandparents can do it with the grandchildren as well. Make

a fort with blankets, or use sheets over chairs, or a table. You might use large cardboard boxes from an appliance store. For an individual box play fort, cut pretend windows and doors on the sides. *Give each child a little flashlight or use larger ones for finger shadows inside the forts or on the walls.*

**7. Have an outdoor food fight.** Just make sure you choose food that is easy to clean up, and doesn't hurt when it hits you. You can let your hair down and have fun and not take yourself seriously. Get loose, and be a kid with the kids. *You can even hose everyone down when it's over.*

**8. Have (your last name here) Olympics.** Hold Olympics just for your family. Events can range from cakewalks, walking relay with an egg on a spoon, include a water balloon toss or raw egg toss. Make sure everyone is included. *You can even make gold, silver and bronze medals out of cardboard and put them on ribbons for the winners.*

**9. Put on a family play.** Go to the library check out books with one or two act plays and act them out as a family for other relatives. Or go to the Senior Center and act out your play at a luncheon there. *Ask someone to videotape.*

**10. Play board games or cards by lantern or candlelight.** Years ago during a snowstorm the power was out for several days. We played Monopoly games by candlelight. Turn off your lights and light the candles, you don't have to lose your power to have this kind of fun! *Be careful with kids around the candles.*

**11. Move the furniture around in the kid's rooms.** Reorganize the closet, add furniture from other rooms, paint a wall or hang family pictures or art work. Have fun creating a "new room".

**12. Decorate a pair of jeans.** Sew different fabric patches, glue jewels, or add buttons, holes or paint. As a family everyone wear them to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade.

**13. Junk trade-off hunt.** Have the family each get something weird,

the uglier the better, from your attic, basement, or garage. Pair up in teams or groups and go door to door - try to get someone to trade you their junk for your junk. Have the family meet together after the hunt to share what they got for their stuff. **Do not allow your child to go alone.**

**14. Cook, serve and clean up blindfolded.** Set up the rules. You cannot touch or guide with your hands, only your voice. The family pairs up older with younger. Starting with setting the table. This might be fun for cold cereal, toaster waffles, a dessert and a cold drink and of course, include clearing the table, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor getting everything in the dustpan blindfolded. Take turns on the different tasks, and remember, no peeking! *Be careful not to use the stove or sharp instruments.* This will not be as easy as it sounds and it is funny to do and to watch. Maybe you can make videos.

**15. Volunteer as a family.** Call

the library and ask to help with tasks they may need. Possibly the Senior Center knows of someone who needs help with errands. Maybe a park needs flowers planted. Use your imagination and call around. Businesses may need a temporary helping hand too.

**16. Sandcastles in your back yard.** Children enjoy playing at the beach with spoons, and scoops making sand castles and starfish. You can put a small amount of sand in a small plastic swimming pool and allow them to use buckets of water to make their imaginary creations.

Have a wonderful time this summer doing safe and fun family activities that may become cherished memories in the future.

Resources: Craig Playstead, Melanie Cooper, Erin Huffstetter, Sonia Spackman.



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