

SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER!

The kids are home — what to do with them? — BY BOBBIE WILLIS —

FOR KIDS, SUMMER MEANS FREEDOM.

But for parents, summer means kids are home 24/7 for nearly three straight months. Ideally, one might envision homemade ice cream and fresh-squeezed lemonade, building summer forts and tree houses, trekking out to the local pool or even to the beach — three months of perfect summer memories.

The reality for working parents is that summer is a numbers game: Week by week, the time gets ticked off with an activity camp here, a playdate exchange there, a family trip/vacation somewhere in between. And there's always the question of cost: No matter how you slice it, three months of child care, summer activities and vacation costs quickly add up. The challenge for most parents is how to plan the summer so that kids have sound supervision, quality time with family and friends, and a fun, relaxing break.

For working parents Chris and Dawn Cianciulli and their two sons Rowan, 8, and Cedar, almost 4, summertime has presented challenges in finding affordable, dependable childcare. After some trial and error, and through luck and community networking, they've found programs that will cover the part-time days that Dawn is at work.

Cedar has a spot in a wonderful daycare situation that provides creative activities and tasty, organic, mostly veggie meals for the kids. Rowan will be with a schoolmate whose mother plans to watch over several

kids for summer income. "It just turned out pretty great," says Dawn, "that we could all work together. We get great childcare and she gets some income and can stay home with her kids."

Rowan will also do a soccer camp through the YMCA, and the Cianciullis have plans for camping trips and incoming family visits. Chris works longer full-time days for Rainbow Valley Design and Construction. His schedule allows Dawn to have more flexibility with part-time work. Dawn also says that flexibility within her job at Saylor Painting Co. has been key for family life. The ability to work within the boys' schedule and to take time off for family outings "couldn't happen without the flexibility," says Dawn.

Dana Tessler, single mom, business manager and co-owner at Rainbow Valley, agrees. "Flexibility at work is *huge*," she says. For Tessler and her 9-year-old daughter, Elianna, summer challenges have been more about finding the right programs to suit where Elianna is developmentally year by year.

"There was a year or two — the summers before and after kindergarten — where we didn't know about camps, and when Elianna was at an in-between age — too old for preschool, but too young for some of the more structured camps," says Tessler. "The last couple of years, we've developed a good pat-



tern."

Elianna will do four weeks of Nearby Nature's (www.nearbynature.org) kids' camps. Tessler says, "Elianna has friends at this camp, and it's low-key but really interesting for her. There's a low child-to-adult ratio, and it works really well for her."

Elianna will do a few weeks of other camps related to her interests in music and theater. She'll also go on summer trips that she and Tessler make every year. Tessler, like Dawn Cianciulli, has found great resources in the parents at Elianna's school, The Village School. "We have a good communi-

ty of moms and parents there," she says.

So while planning for summer can be a little stressful, even for the busiest parents, the season is usually full of afternoons at the pool, weekend barbecues, campouts and visits with family. Tessler puts it all in perspective, "We rush kids so much to grow up. We don't always cherish what time we have with them, and then they're grown up and gone."

EW

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