



How to Keep Your Cool During Summer Routines and Challenging Behaviors

Summers are filled with fun, sun, and adventure. Children are excited to be home from school and looking forward to all the activities families have planned. Parents and caregivers are equally excited, but often there can be a bit of apprehension. It is not uncommon for families to wonder “What will we do all summer?” “How do I keep my kids from becoming bored?” “There is so much structure and routine at school, how do I replicate that at home?” “My child does better with a schedule, will she/he regress at home?” These feelings are natural and warranted. However there are a few strategies you can implement that will help improve your child’s behavior and help you feel more effective as a parent.

1. Rules

Children crave structure. The transition from the school year to summer vacation will go smoother if there are rules in place. Children are used to having rules to follow at school and the positive outcomes will be similar if there are rules to follow at home. Rules should be few in number (i.e., 3-5), easy to follow, and should state what you want the child to do rather than what you want them to stop doing (e.g., Walk through the house vs. Don’t run). It is essential that rules are positively stated because nothing can be lost in translation. Adults often send mixed messages to children without realizing it. Explicit rules indicating the behavior we want to observe increases the chances the desirable behavior will reoccur.

2. Consequences

What is the point of having rules if there are no consequences in place? Rules become empty threats instead of guidelines for expectations and routines. Consequences should be immediate and tied to the challenging behavior. Not all incidences require a time out or loss of privileges. Often simply identify the rule which was broken and correcting the behavior will suffice. For example, if the rule is to “walk through the house” and the child ran across the kitchen then stop the child and tell them they need to go back and walk. By correcting the behavior, you are enforcing the rule and the natural consequence of breaking the rule results in the child who was in a hurry to get somewhere now delayed by having to go back and walk.

3. Consistency

There is nothing more important in dealing with challenging behavior than being consistent. Consistency is related to how, when, and where the adult reacts to errant behavior. Consistency allows the child to understand what the expectations for desirable behavior are as well as the consequences for not following expectations. When adults are

inconsistent in their reactions and implementing consequences, the child struggles to understand the cause and effect relationship of their behavior and the environment. Consistent reactions which immediately follow the challenging behavior are most effective. Adults hold on to the behavioral incident and may want to address it later, but unless it is immediate it will be a distant memory to a child. Often the child may not even recall what happened. Learning happens through connection. We must connect the experiences.

Also, as summer nears the midpoint, it is time to review your “to do” list of fun activities and adventures. Some activities may remain on the list due to apprehension as to how things may go...hoping for the best, but concern that you may not get the “best version” of your child’s behavior. If you keep in mind the tips mentioned above and prepare in advance, you can minimize the challenging behaviors and increase desirable behaviors. For specific steps and strategies for planning outings with your children, see the handout, *Planned Activities Routines*.

Do not duplicate without permission. © 2013 Brooke Winchell