

## 10 Top Tips for a Harmonious Summer

The countdown to the Summer Holidays has started, and there is much to look forward to! The holiday period, however, can also bring issues and challenges for families. As routines go out of the window, changes in diet, sleeping and exercise patterns can mean that children get over-stimulated or tired. In addition, we may have expectations of holidays that are not met. As a result, we feel disappointed and frustrated and anxious about our child's apparent selfishness etc.

So here are The Parent Practice's Top Tips for handling the holiday season.

❶ **SET THE MOOD** by noticing and acknowledging your children for what they get right, rather than focussing first on what they get wrong. (We can still work on improving behaviour!) Give detailed praise about the behaviours you value such as *"Thank you for helping your sister find her bunny, that's kind"* or *"I love it when you play together with the trains, sharing the carriages between you was a great idea"* or *"I appreciated it when you helped me with the shopping this morning"*. Research shows that a positive relationship requires 5 positive comments for each negative comment. (Gottman Institute)

❷ **LOOK AHEAD**, anticipate what could be difficult and take preventive action. Discuss with your partner how you will manage late nights, different foods, more screen time, going out, and having guests.

❸ **DO LESS** to minimise stress and allow you to focus on being with your children. Plan for some time for yourself as well.

❹ **PROVIDE TIME ALONE** with each child every day – it doesn't have to be long, perhaps 10 minutes, but it's important they know they can have your positive attention so they don't need to play up for it.

❺ **CHAT THROUGH** situations before they arise with your children – ask them what they think will need to happen/how they need to behave, in detail. For example, saying thank you or hello to people. If it's a challenge for your child, then practice it in role-play. Try asking them how they might feel when having to try new food or on car journeys, and what ideas they may have to solve the problem. Praise every sensible/brave response.

❻ **SET RULES** for the holidays in advance, rather than making them up as you go along. For example, when do they need to get dressed in the morning, how much tv or computer time is allowed each day, what time is bedtime? There should *be* rules even if these are different from those you have at home/in term time. You may need to discuss house rules with the parents of other families under the same roof.

Keep rules positive – about what they CAN do, rather than focus on what they are not allowed to do.

❼ **GIVE REWARDS for good behaviour** – but try to avoid material things! Use a Pasta Jar or set up a star chart, and be generous. You want to fill it up quickly so don't make it too hard to win a star or piece of pasta. You can offer them an activity with you, a chance to dress up, have candles or bubbles in the bath, or do some cooking or painting. You can arrange it so that the children earn an activity or outing, or screen-time etc, for completing the tasks they need to do, such as tidying away toys or making beds.

❽ **THINK about why they 'mis'behave**. Rather than shout, blame, criticise etc, try to think about the reason for the misbehaviour. Was there an emotion driving it, such as jealousy or frustration, or was

the child looking for attention? Were they tired, over-stimulated or over-sugared? Help your child calm down in a quiet place, so she can come back and make amends. If you think it's about gaining attention, make sure you're giving lots of positive attention to the things she is doing well.

⑨ **THINK about consequences.** When your child gets it wrong, rather than scold or shout or remove possessions, ask them to do a 'Take Two' and do it again the right way. Eg *"Mmm, that didn't sound very polite or grateful. Can you say that again?"* Some behaviours require more than simply doing it again. When we avoid blame and criticism, our children are much more willing and better able to learn how to behave. For example, if they throw a toy in anger at you and break it, they need to clear up the pieces and make amends. Sending them to their room isn't going to help them learn how to put mistakes right. Have a problem-solving mindset, and avoid threatening a consequence that you don't carry out!

⑩ **BALANCE STRUCTURED TIME AND UNSTRUCTURED TIME** – it is not your role to be the children's entertainment director; they need to think of things to do for themselves. In a family meeting ask them to come up with a list of possible things to do on their own that they can consult when they are at a loss of what to do. Help them create an "I'm Not Bored" board with loads of boredom buster ideas.

For further information on how to make family life calmer and easier and bring out the best in your children contact The Parent Practice on 020 8673 3444 / [www.theparentpractice.com](http://www.theparentpractice.com)