

One Last Summer Hurrah Before School Starts

Summer's almost over, some ideas for enjoying the last days as a family

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It's almost sundown for summer.

For many families, there are only a few days left before earlier bedtimes, hectic morning routines and homework assignments take away from quality family time.

Here are some things you can do with the kids to make the most of the last days of summer.

BE A DO-GOODER: Help those who are less fortunate, said Charlotte Reznick, author of "The Power of Your Child's Imagination." See if the local soup kitchen needs a young server. Bake cookies or make cards for a nursing home or homeless shelter. "It really helps them develop compassion for others," said Reznick, an educational psychologist and former UCLA Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology. "It also helps them feel better about themselves." Plus, you're ending the summer on a wonderful note, she added.



GO BERRY PICKING: Find a u-pick-em berry farm to harvest fresh berries with the kids, said Heather Flett, co-author of "The Rookie Mom's Handbook." Use the berries to make a pie or jam, add them to pancakes or pop them straight into your mouths. "It's a fun field trip for them, and they're learning something," said Flett, a mom of two. "If you can make the connection between having healthy food and what they get in their lunch boxes that's a plus."

PLAN A DAY TRIP: Have the kids think of one thing they want to do before summer ends that is within round-trip driving distance on a tank of gas, said Mary Giles, Executive Editor of Disney FamilyFun. Some suggestions: a minor league baseball game, the zoo or aquarium, an amusement or water park, hiking or tubing. "Sometimes families can reach the end of summer and feel like the time slipped away before they really took advantage of what the season offers," Giles said in an e-mail. "This idea gives everyone the chance to have one last hurrah — to do one of the things they most enjoy about summertime and, hopefully, make some lasting memories."

HAVE A FAMILY FAVORITES DAY: Each person picks his or her favorite thing or activity from the summer, such as favorite game, food or book, said Nina Senatore, an assistant professor of education at Simmons College in Boston. "Put it all together and have a super family favorites night," she said. That might mean hot dogs on the grill, a game of Scrabble and reading from someone's favorite book. Choosing a favorite thing from the summer teaches kids evaluation skills, said Senatore. "And it's a nice way for families to remember the fabulous things they were involved in over the summer."

DO A ROLE REVERSAL: Choose a day or part of a day for a role reversal, said Bonnie Harris, author of "Confident Parents, Remarkable Kids." The children get to tell you what they are going to do — within reason. (Make sure they know you have veto power if the choice of activity is impossible or inappropriate). "Children are programmed during the school year from waking to sleeping — what to do, and when and how to do it are dictated by adults all day long," Harris said in an e-mail. "Let's give them one or two days a year at least to call the shots and see what they come up with."

GO CAMPING IN THE BACKYARD: Pilar Guzman, editor-in-chief of Cookie, said she recently went over to another family's house who had set up a tent and fire pit in their backyard and moved their outdoor furniture around the pit. The kids collected sticks for marshmallow roasting, and everyone sat around the fire making s'mores. Camping at home is the perfect end-of-summer activity, Guzman said: "A reminder of the freedom of summer and of living outdoors — but keeps you close to home where you need to be to get organized before school starts."

HANG OUT AT HOME: Kids are so busy during the summer with camp, swimming lessons and family vacations, said Christina Vercelletto, senior editor at Parenting. Now that camp is over and most families are back from vacation, it's a great time for kids to reconnect with their friends and spend time at home, said Vercelletto, a mom of three. "Do a craft in the backyard, have the kids help you in the vegetable garden, slow down and try to do relaxing activities before school starts," she said.

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