

Summer Explosion 2015—What to Do?

It is nearly 19 years since I have been writing in this newspaper. Almost every year, I endeavored to write an article to parents or students about how to manage their time during the summer holidays. Now I am wondering, what more can I say?

I can repeat some of the same information I did in years past or I can try to research new ideas. What I can say is that the challenges students and parents will be facing during this summer are very different than those of 19 years ago. We have fully moved from the “bubler” phone (low cost phone) to the smart phone. Within the past five years, we have had an explosion in technology. The iPad came out in April of 2010. In September of that year, Samsung joined the competition with the Samsung Galaxy tablet. Then in September 2011, the Kindle went on the market. The high definition (HD) world of technology started to explode within the past 10 years. HD television was really officially introduced in 1993. However, today it is almost a requirement for television and now computers, tablets, and smart phones. Wireless and Bluetooth connections are the norm. You can walk in any part of your house or even on the streets and get Internet connection. Roku and Blu-ray are new video terms in our digital libraries.

Years ago, only a few privileged folk were allowed to live-stream on the World Wide Web. Now live streaming or uploading of videos for on-demand viewing is open to everyone on the planet and it is free. One thing we do know is that today’s world is extremely smaller than it was 19 years ago. Everyone everywhere can have instant, live video contact with each other. The distance does not matter. The time zone does not matter. The language differences do not matter. One can be on the North Pole or on the Flamingo ponds of Inagua, The Bahamas, and be instantly connected in real time.

Another major difference between 1996 and 2015 is that the modern tablet or smart phone allows us to do anything we want and anywhere we like. We can be walking, jogging or lying in bed, while doing any of the following: organizing, planning, accounting, reading, gaming, communicating, audio recording, video recording, purchasing, ordering, onsite managing, managing security, and much more.

INSTANT MESSAGING

All of these wonderful gifts of accessibility are also causing problems in our societies. When I was young, I had more than 50 pen pals. These were persons my age I met via sending letters to them. We would write each other exchanging information and becoming “pen pals.” These letters would take days, weeks, or even months to reach their destinations. We had to develop patience waiting for the responses from our pen friends. We had thrills running down or spines when anticipating that a letter would be coming with a photo of the new pen pal. It was exciting; really exciting. Today, with instant messaging, there is instant communication. Teenagers can sit and have multiple conversations at one time just by using an electronic hand-held device. That sounds exiting but they do not have the waiting and anticipating I did 50 years ago. That taught us patience. Because of this too many of our teens today are lacking effective social and true communication skills. The problem with the online instant messaging is the risk of rash or inappropriate relationships being made. Sex predators are lurking the online platforms ready to prey on the innocent.

More than 10 years ago, MySpace was the top popular online chat site with millions of members. Here are the latest statistics on MySpace. There are 75 million users at peak times on MySpace. There are 300 million video views in one month on MySpace. FaceBook has more than 1.4 billion monthly users. An online police stated 10 years ago that at any given hour there were more than 50,000 sex predators on MySpace seeking to lure innocent girls and boys into a maze of sexual confusion. Even FaceBook is being used by sex predators to lure innocent boys and girls into a sex trap.

Another challenge we have today is the lack of natural, face-to-face friendship. Although it is said that because of FaceBook young people are having more friendship relationships than ever in the history of humankind, this is only true numerically. The “instant friendships” are very superficial at best. The human touch is no longer relevant and that is frightening. Teens can be sitting in the same room just talk distance apart and feel more comfortable texting each other

than talking face to face. This is scary. The social skills are changing right before our eyes, but it is not really helping us. It is destroying us. Even the language is changing. Teenagers have little incentive to speak and write properly. Why? This is because the language of instant messaging is about abbreviations, bad spelling, and poor sentence construction. No wonder the latest research states that this is the first generation in history of the earth that will not have an advantage over the previous generation.

SUMMER SUGGESTIONS

Parents, in the midst of all of this, what should you do? I have a few suggestions.

1. If your children will not be working outside of the home this summer, then make sure that each day they have about two to five hours of some kind of physical labor or activity. It could be playing outdoor games, cleaning the house, going to the beach, etc.
2. Restrict the use of the electronic gadgets of all kinds during the summer. Don't allow the gadgets to be the summer "baby sitter." You will regret it. The younger the child is, the less time should be spent on a gadget, including viewing the television. For instance, do not allow your 13-year old to spend more than two hours a day on an iPad or smart phone. Do not allow your 5-year old to utilize the iPad more than thirty minutes a day. Of course the parent/guardian will decide what they will be doing with the gadget. Do not let the child decide on his or her own. As I have mentioned in previous articles, research tells us that children three and under should not use any kind of electronic gadget, including the television. Why? Because it has been proven to hamper brain development and intellect.
3. Schedule fun time with your children. Do not just tell them what to do. Get involved. Have fun with them. Laugh with them. Wrestle with them. Yah!
4. Plan to have at least one "Gadget Free Day" every three weeks during the summer holidays. Now this will not be easy. You and your children will need to be creative. This might be the time when outdoor trips or fun time will be useful. This might be the time they will use the sewing machine, craft sticks, paint brush, or do minor repair around the house, etc.
5. Set summer bed and meal times. Do not make the mistake to let the rule evaporate during the summer holidays. There should still be sound structure during this time of fun and exploration. It would not be wise to have your children up any hour during the night, doing anything they want to do. Ensure they get healthy meals and set meal times. It would be foolish to allow them to eat only when you ask them if they are hungry. This is not wise.

During the summer holidays, it is a great time to reinforce discipline in the lives of your children. Parents, don't be lazy. What you refuse to do now will cause much more work and frustration in the future. Have a wonderful summer holiday.

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