Sheppard Pratt's *Summer Resources* for Kids & Parents



While summer break can bring relaxation for parents and children alike, it can also lead to some stressful situations for parents to diffuse!

So, we put together some resources to help parents and children cope with summer-related challenges. Take a look through this packet for tips on:

- Navigating summer vacations with ease
- Empowering kids to have a peaceful, productive summer
- Helping teens balance their lazy summer days
- Addressing boredom – without resorting to more screen time
- Tackling back-to-school anxiety as summer winds down

We hope these resources are helpful as you get through the upcoming summer break. But, if you find that your child needs more support, Sheppard Pratt has mental health programs to help.

Summer is the perfect time to address mental health challenges. Sheppard Pratt is here to help, and a day hospital – also known as a partial hospitalization program – might be the perfect fit.

Day hospitals provide a schedule that aligns with a typical school day, (Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.). Our child and adolescent day hospital is the perfect level of mental health treatment for someone who needs more support than they've been getting in outpatient therapy. Sheppard Pratt also offers a day hospital program for adults.

We also offer:

- Walk-in Psychiatric Urgent Care
- Inpatient units
- Outpatient mental health therapy and medication management
- Nonpublic special education schools
- And so much more – you can find every mental health treatment you and your loved ones need, all at Sheppard Pratt

To learn more about Sheppard Pratt mental health resources, including our day hospital:
scan the QR code
visit sheppardpratt.org/summer
or call us at 410-938-4949.

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Summer vacation on the horizon?

We've got tips for making travel stress-free.



Ah, a summer vacation. Time to pack up, take a break, and enjoy a family trip. As wonderful as it sounds, family travel can also be a major source of anxiety for kids and teens. Unfamiliar environments, a change in routine, meeting new people—it can be overwhelming. Fortunately, with some planning and flexibility, parents can help make any summer trip a win-win for everyone. Here are a few tips for making your summer travel as stress-free as possible:

- **Involve kids in the planning**. While parents should still make the major decisions, they can allow their kids the opportunity to help plan some activities. This will help them feel some ownership over the trip. If kids are involved, they will also have clearer expectations about the destination, lodging, food, Wi-Fi availability, and sleeping arrangements
- **Be prepared.** Pack travel games and activities appropriate for a car or plane to help pass the time. You can also give older kids a camera and put them in charge of taking photos – and bonus, it's something fun to bring back and show friends.
- **Keep some structure to your schedule**. While it may be a vacation, a daily agenda will help kids feel more comfortable. What time does everyone wake up? When is nap time? Dinner time? Try to be structured about meal times, and call ahead for reservations when you can. Don't forget to pencil in time for kids to have privacy or downtime if they need it. And be prepared with plenty of snacks and games to pass the time if your schedule is thrown off.
- **Show your excitement**. Let your kids hear your enthusiasm about the trip, either by talking directly to them or letting them overhear you talking to your spouse about all the fun things you will do.
- **Address any anxiety**. Ask your child what they are feeling nervous about and help reassure them. If they are anxious about airplanes, familiarize them by looking at relevant books or videos. Challenge their thinking while being supportive. Pack fidget spinners, coping gadgets, or anything else to help ground them.

Have realistic expectations. Not everything will go to plan, and that's okay. Acknowledge this fact and be prepared to pivot. It's a great way to teach kids flexibility. You can model that even when something unpredictable happens, you can embrace uncertainty and still have fun.

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How to make Summer both *peaceful* and *productive*



Summer break brings unique opportunities for parents to enjoy well-earned downtime with their children. But it also requires parents to navigate the delicate balance of encouraging fun and relaxation while managing screen time and providing enrichment. It can be tricky to balance nurturing development while keeping kids engaged and off their phones! Here are a few tips to help you have a peaceful and productive summer with your little ones.

Maintain predictability

Kids do better with structure. And that can be even more true if your child lives with anxiety, ADHD, or autism. Keeping to your child's usual bedtimes and mealtimes in the summer can provide much-needed stability. A visual aid can be useful, too. Posting the day's schedule helps kids prepare to move from one activity to another. The day's schedule might include wake-up times, chores, camps, trips, screen time allowances, and leisure time.

Remember, filling leisure time is a skill. You can help them develop that skill by providing a rich environment, such as a playroom with a puzzle, a piano, a set of paints, or a bookshelf. Expose them to many options and encourage them to choose what to engage with.

Follow their lead

The crux of leisure skills is independent play. But when your child is learning this skill, you can have an important role. Rather than directing play, engage with them and follow their lead. Go for a walk together and collect items to use in an art project. Sensory exploration can spark new thoughts and experiences, too. To stimulate the senses, try playing with water, sand, or fidget toys.

Offer tools and motivational devices to enjoy screen-free time

An iPad can be a great resource in limited doses. Access to uninterrupted screen time during the summer can make for a difficult transition back to school in the fall. It can also take away from time to work on leisure skills, get outside, or enjoy friends and family. Set scheduled screen time just like you would on a school night. Predictability can ease the transition to less preferred activities.

And a dose of boredom isn't always a bad thing. It can help kids develop problem-solving skills and creativity, along with building tolerance for the not-so-fun experiences in life. Help them see these moments as opportunities rather than deficits, and when they do, reward them with praise or earning points towards a fun activity.

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How to balance your summer days:

Tips for Teens



We've all heard how important it is to effectively manage your time. Managing your time can help provide balance in your day and help you to feel in control of your life. When you have a balanced daily routine, you may experience:

- Less stress
- Better health and wellbeing
- More productivity
- More enjoyable and more frequent interaction with friends and family members
- Less loneliness and boredom
- More energy

So, what are the components of a balanced day?

1. **Self-care time.** When you're engaging in self-care, you are taking care of your own body in ways like bathing/showering, eating meals, and sleeping.
2. **Play/leisure time.** These are activities that are entertaining or enjoyable, and aren't related to school, work, or self-care. These activities could include reading a book, playing a video game, or something else you find fun.
3. **School/work time.** School/work time could be school, a job, or a volunteer activity. It's something you've specifically committed your time to, or something you're required to attend.
4. **Free/unstructured time.** This is the category for all of the other time in your day – the parts that aren't taken up by self-care, play/leisure, or school/work.

As you think about your average day, does it seem balanced?

If you find that your days don't feel balanced, what can you do about it? Here are a few tips:

1. **Prioritize your responsibilities.** Making daily and weekly "to do" lists can help you figure out what is most important and what can wait for another day.
2. **Block out time to accomplish specific tasks.** Make a calendar appointment with yourself – and don't bail on yourself!
3. **Set, and stick to, daily routines.** Whether it's getting out of bed by 7:30 a.m. or taking a walk in the park at 2:00 p.m. every day, try to establish some consistency in your days.
4. **Don't procrastinate.** This is easier said than done! When you procrastinate, you're less productive and less likely to accomplish what's on your to-do list – which can translate into a bad mood and being dissatisfied with what you've gotten done.
5. **Get enough sleep.** Without enough sleep, your brain won't function properly – impacting your ability to learn and concentrate.

Beating boredom without resorting to more screen time!



The summer season, with its longer days and unstructured routines, may make teens more likely to experience boredom.

"School-aged children and teenagers spend nine months a year in a school environment that brings overwhelming amounts of social pressures, academic pressures, lack of sleep, and provides a highly structured routine," explains Vaune Kopeck, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist at Sheppard Pratt. "Teens often complain about having no free time during the school year, but too much free time during the summer! This leads to boredom in the summer months."

What can you do to help your teen thrive in the summer months?

Watch and wait.
It's OK to give your teen some time to decompress and enjoy a well-deserved break from the rigors of the school year. During the first week of break, watch what your teen does with their time. This will provide clues about their activity level, interests, need for increased or decreased level of structure, and potential for boredom.

Help, but don't "over" help!
Ultimately, you should aim to help them enjoy a summer break with a combination of relaxation, social engagement, productive activity, and unstructured time by themselves. "Your role as a parent is to prepare your children with the skills to take their place in society as a productive, healthy, and happy person," explains Kopeck. "If a parent spends too much time scheduling their teenager's time, then they will not learn to do it for themselves. Unstructured time and even being 'bored' can lead to greater creativity, problem-solving skills, increased self-motivation, and an opportunity to explore and increase the variety of interests."

Foster personal responsibility.
Summer offers a great opportunity to increase your teen's level of responsibility. Engagement in productive activities such as work, chores, volunteering, academics, or camps can teach responsibility and good work habits, improve time management, and build confidence and self-reliance.

Create a routine.
Routines are the easiest way to help teens keep track of what they need to do. Routines can alleviate anxiety by offering a roadmap for the day's expectations. Routines also help teens maintain a consistent diet and exercise regimen, complete activities, and foster social connection with others.

Bored no more

Productive uses of time during the adolescent years can increase their confidence, skill development, and self-reliance. In contrast, too much unproductive time may make teens more likely to engage in risky behaviors and activities, and potentially experience a decline in their mental health. Establishing routines that include a balance of rest, leisure, and productive activity is important to maintain mental health in the summer months and all year long.

Helping kids beat *back-to-school anxiety*



For some students, back-to-school can be an exciting time to reunite with friends, meet new teachers, and set goals for the academic year ahead. For others, the return of the school year can reignite feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression that had seemed to dissipate over the summer break.

The shift from a carefree summer filled with leisure activities to the social and academic responsibilities and expectations of school can be overwhelming for students of all ages. For many children, these worries can be so pervasive that they may avoid going to school altogether.

Anxiety and avoidant behaviors go hand in hand: it is simply human nature to avoid tasks that scare us. But the longer kids are away from the classroom, the harder it can be for them to integrate back into a school setting. School avoidance can result in poor grades, peer relationship challenges, and strained family dynamics.

By understanding and addressing potential issues kids may face as they return to classroom learning, parents, teachers, and caregivers can play a vital role in supporting their children's mental wellness.

Establish a routine

Many students struggle to manage their time effectively while balancing schoolwork with extracurricular activities, which can increase the pressure to perform well academically. Establishing routines and gradually reintroducing school-related activities before the first day can help them ease into the back-to-school transition. This may include developing time management skills by creating study schedules, setting realistic goals, and prioritizing important tasks.

Make healthy connections

For students who have social anxiety, the thought of reconnecting with peers or adjusting to new settings at the beginning of the school year can be especially daunting. Social interactions play a crucial role in a child's overall wellbeing, and feeling isolated or excluded can have a significant negative impact on their mental health. To help children prepare to reenter social situations, parents can organize playdates with friends—old or new—before school starts.

Put it into practice

Younger children, especially those starting school for the first time, may experience separation anxiety from parents or guardians. Being in an unfamiliar environment with new faces can trigger feelings of distress and insecurity. To help, parents can practice short separations from their child before the first day of school, allowing them to gradually adjust to being apart.

Returning to school after summer break can be both exciting and challenging for children's mental health. Helping alleviate your child's school-related anxiety begins with being able to recognize the signs of anxiety itself. If your child or student is experiencing changes in their sleep patterns, irritability, or has lost interest in activities that once brought them joy, it may be time to seek support.

Mental Health *Resources*

If you, your child, or a loved one is in need of help for your mental health, Sheppard Pratt is here.

We offer mental healthcare for the whole family – all throughout Maryland.

Psychiatric Urgent Care: walk-in urgent care for mental health conditions. A licensed mental health professional will perform a level-of-care assessment and connect you to the services that are right for you.

Inpatient Units: we offer inpatient mental healthcare for individuals who are a danger to themselves or others. Staffed by caring, compassionate mental health professionals, inpatient units provide intensive care and 24/7 support.

Day Hospitals: our day hospitals, offered at our hospitals in Towson and Elkridge, provide a 'middle ground' between outpatient and inpatient care.

Outpatient Mental Health Centers: at our outpatient mental health centers, all throughout Maryland, we offer therapy and medication management. Services are also available via telehealth.

Special Education Schools: Sheppard Pratt is the largest provider of nonpublic special education services in Maryland. Our schools are often a great fit for youth with an IEP who don't receive enough support in their public schools.

And more!

Visit sheppardpratt.org or call 410-938-5000
to connect with a Care Navigator today.

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