

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Are You Getting The Most Out Of That Family Vacation?

from the American Counseling Association

Summer vacations are a fairly recent innovation, becoming popular around the middle of the nineteenth century. Schools traditionally took a summer break, "vacating" school buildings during the hot summer months, and it was from those actions that the vacation concept grew.

But despite a century and a half of growing vacation popularity, many of us still do a fairly poor job of letting our vacations do what they're supposed to do -- give us a change to relax, to escape daily stresses and return refreshed and recharged.

Of course, for many of us in high-stress and demanding jobs, it can be difficult to walk away from work responsibilities for an extended period of time. Yet when one takes a large part of the office on that vacation, at least mentally, it usually means little relaxation, and can bring added stress as work demands now impinge on what should be family fun time.

Fortunately, there are cures for this problem. One is simply to schedule specific work times during your vacation. Maybe it's one or two mornings a week when work obligations can be addressed while the family goes off to enjoy themselves. Then, when work responsibilities are met, turn off the office demands and relax.

Another issue that can add stress to a family vacation is trying to fit in too much. When each and every minute is committed it's a guarantee that stress levels will be high. While it's fine to plan and schedule, part of the calendar should block out open time to discover something new and unexpected, or just to sit back, relax and do nothing.

It's also important to be realistic about what your family can and can't do. A good vacation has the whole family enjoying it, rather than fighting and complaining. One way to handle that is simply to plan for activities that will at least meet some of the needs of each family member. Kids are capable of understanding that not everything has to center on them, at least when they know their desires are also being considered. That morning visit to the museum might elicit some groans, but should be acceptable when it's followed by that afternoon at the water park.

The key to a successful vacation is to keep it simple, don't over-plan or over-schedule. Make the goal that everyone comes back as refreshed and relaxed as possible.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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