

# Pointers For Parents

## Maximize Family Time With Mini-Breaks

(NAPSA)—Whether it's a few days off or summer vacation, when school's out, one of the biggest challenges facing parents is finding fun and economical activities to do with their kids. Summertime often includes a longer family vacation, but what about the stretches of time in between? There are infinite opportunities to take breaks from routines (even just for a day) in your own backyard.

Mini-breaks not only provide a change of pace, more importantly, they provide parents an opportunity to spend time with their kids with the benefit of creating memories and traditions to last a lifetime.

Donna Erickson, syndicated columnist, author of books on parenting and host of the award-winning creative family television series "Donna's Day," offers these ideas:

- **Grow together with your children's interests.** Reflect on the school year and think about the things that fascinate them. Then, do simple activities related to that subject matter. For example, if your kids show an interest in dinosaurs, then plan an outing to a field museum. Or, check with your local parks, YMCA, library, zoo and children's book and toy stores to check out classes or workshops on the topic.

- **Fore!** Make a miniature golf course in your own backyard. Collect cans of various sizes, flowerpots, garden hoses, boards, bricks and other suitable items. Space the cans around the yard to create the holes. Use the other items to create obstacles. For example, use a board and a log to make an incline, then place a container filled with water at the end of the board to make a water hazard.

- **Hit the trails.** Take nature walks at a nearby park or nature center. For extra fun when you return home, scrape the mud off the bottom of boots into clay saucers half-filled with potting soil. Water, cover with plastic and see what germinates. Not only will you create an experiment and watch a mystery garden develop, you'll have something visual to remind you of the outing!



Donna Erickson

- **Make a production out of it.** On those rainy days when you're trapped inside, pull out the dusty boxes full of old slides or photos. Those old pictures of you and extended family members are sure to be a hit with your kids. Or relive a vacation with pictures or videos from a family trip. Make a snack and lower the lights to create a movie-going atmosphere.

In order to make your mini-breaks a success, experts suggest keeping a few things in mind:

- **Don't try to do too much at one time, especially with young children.** An hour or two will keep them wanting more and you can return to the activity another day.

- **Variety.** Take a short trip one day and do a follow-up activity the next, such as hulling berries after visiting a strawberry farm. Balance indoor and outdoor activities. Try hands-on activities as well as sightseeing trips. For families with more than one child, keep in mind that interests will vary.

- **Snack time is an important time.** Food allows kids to slow down and take a much-needed rest. The food breaks needn't be elaborate. In fact, there are many interesting, easy-to-prepare food products available now. Red Baron makes a mini-pizza that comes eight to a box—perfect for a quick snack between activities or to break up routine days.

- **Have FUN!** Remember to laugh, be curious, put yourself in your children's frame of mind. The point is to enjoy spending time with people you love.

For additional ideas on family activities and taking mini-breaks, visit [www.donnasday.com](http://www.donnasday.com) or [www.redbaron.com/minis](http://www.redbaron.com/minis).