



Keeping Kids Active

Taking a team approach as parents can help ensure fun, healthy spring break.

Spring break is fast approaching, and that sound you hear is the collective cheer of thousands of Oregon kids ready to take a breather from the classroom.

For parents, the reaction might be more mixed. Perhaps spring break means a reprieve from a typical go-go-go week of homework and shuttling between school, practices, games, scout meetings, performances and other extracurricular activities. For families not planning a vacation - for those parents who will regularly clock in at work during spring break - kids' time off can present challenges about how to keep them active, safe and having fun.

Fear not, parents. When it comes to healthy and fun activities, opportunities abound, from less structured to more supervised. Here are a few ideas:

- Organize a neighborhood soccer, basketball or baseball game.
- Go to the movies.
- Spend a day at a museum or community center. It's a great way to learn about art, culture and science. And community centers typically have organized programs and classes as well as sports courts and swimming pools.
- If you're the parent of a teen, look into mentoring opportunities for your kids. Older kids develop leadership skills and younger kids spend some time with someone they can look up to.
- Check out your local laser tag or paintball place, or visit an area skate park or rock gym.
- Hit a bucket of balls at a golf course driving range or play a round.
- Pick an area park or hiking trail you've never visited and explore with a group of friends.
- Get a jump on Earth Day. Invite friends to help clean up a nearby park, then have a picnic there.
- Volunteer at a local charity or help your child organize their own community service project.
- Check out a local historic site or building.
- Plan a meal or barbecue, shop for groceries and prepare the food. Make it a family dinner or invite the neighbors.
- If your family or your neighbors are from another culture or interested in sharing information about other cultures, consider cooking ethnic food together, sharing a meal and exchanging info about other countries and cultures.

How can you ensure a fun and safe spring break for your kids amid your busy workweek? One strategy is the team approach. Consider connecting with the parents of your child's friends and sharing responsibilities, such as dropping off and picking up the kids from the movies, camp, classes or other activities.

If possible, also consider taking turns taking one day off of work during spring break week and chaperoning a group of kids. It will help spread the carpooling duties, add a little fun to your week, and help you better connect with other parents and your child's friends.

Whether it's sports, music, science, the outdoors or other interests, busy kids have great opportunities to learn and grow. And they are less likely to get involved in risky behavior. Research backs this up. The more activities kids are involved with, the less likely they are to use cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs.

And remember: keeping kids busy doesn't have to mean spendy. The value of staying busy is effective regardless of whether an activity carries a price tag. Many activities have low or no cost, such as volunteering, participating in a church youth group or helping organize a neighborhood movie review club.

For more fun, active and healthy spring break ideas, please visit Oregon Partnership's Web site, orpartnership.org. There you'll find a list of suggested activities and links, including ideas generated by young people.

This article was written by Oregon Partnership, a statewide nonprofit that provides substance abuse prevention education and treatment referral. For parenting resources, please contact Oregon Partnership at 503-244-5211, or visit www.faceitparents.com or www.orpartnership.org.