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## Slow Down For Summer: Being Present with your Family without the Guilt

parenthood



### FOURTH OF JULY WEEKEND WILL SOON BE UPON US.

This is a popular time for many of us to make lasting memories from barbecues to fireworks. For my family, this is typically vacation time and we all look forward to it every year.

It is with this in mind that I want to talk about the importance of slowing down and just being present with our families. So easily, our lives can become a rapid pace of go-go-go. There's school and work and extracurriculars and birthday parties. (Don't even get me started on the holiday season or back-to-school time!) If your littles are too small for this hustle to be your norm yet, consider yourself lucky.

**AND REALLY, THAT'S ALL THE MORE REASON TO ENJOY THIS SLOWER PACE NOW. IT DOESN'T LAST. NOTHING DOES, DOES IT? THAT'S EXACTLY THE POINT.**

Summer is fleeting. Our kids being young--our babies being babies--is such a short time in our lives when you look at the big picture. **What do you want to remember about this chapter of your life when you reflect back on it later? What do you really want to pay attention to? And more importantly, how do you want to feel?** Always rushed, always exhausted? Like you're absent or missing out? Like you're only around to taxi people or maintain a house? Or, do you want to remember watching your kids discover ants for the first time? Or the way the sun bounces off of their hair? Do you want to be there to warm their soggy, shivering little bodies with cuddles after they've splashed in the pool all afternoon?

It's really a no-brainer, isn't it? We all want to be more present with our kids. And all of us--therapists included--could do better at it.

**Here are some ways to be present with your kids without guilt this summer:**

### 1. PUT YOUR CELL PHONE AWAY.

You could probably have guessed I was going to say that one, right? But, really, try to set limits on your cell phone usage and just observe what kind of difference it makes in your day. Consider it an experiment.

### 2. TAKE PICTURES.

One caveat to putting your phone away is all those photo ops you don't want to miss. I wouldn't want to deny you those, so do snap those pics when you can. You'll be so glad you did later.

### 3. GET OUTSIDE.

I'll be honest--the heat has been insane in Sacramento lately. But, like with everything, it's only temporary. Find ways to maximize your (and your family's) enjoyment of the season even when weather is crazy. When the weather is good, get outside and play. Or just lay in the grass and watch the clouds with your kids. When you get one of those rare rainstorms--especially if your electricity goes out--make it memorable by lighting candles and listening to the radio or reading stories. And when it's just too hot to do anything but stay inside during the daytime, maybe let your littles stay up a bit later than usual to go outside and count the stars when the temperatures have cooled down.

### 4. THE DISHES CAN WAIT.

Seriously. Permission to let some things go. It's only summer for so long. Your kids are little for only so long. Let yourself off the hook once in a while.

### 5. LET YOURSELF SLEEP IN.

Or, go to bed early if that's your thing. Or take an afternoon nap. (In a hammock, preferably, right?) Summer can be a high-energy, play hard kind of season, but also, the phrase "lazy summer days" is a thing for a reason. You can't be present if you aren't feeling good, and there just might be no better way to feel good than by snagging a little extra rest.

### 6. EMBRACE NOSTALGIA.

What happy childhood memories of summer stand out to you? How can you recreate that vibe for your own family? Or, can you pull out photo albums and share stories with your kids or reconnect with old friends?

### 7. ENJOY THE SIMPLE THINGS.

*Laying in the grass. Popsicles. Digging your toes in the sand. Watching for shooting stars. Roasting marshmallows.* Summer camps, sports leagues and swimming lessons can be positive things for our kids, but I want to let you know that it's completely OK to have zero activities planned for your kids for the summer. They will still be learning, growing and making memories because that's just what kids do. And if your littles are too young for that stuff anyway, trust me, you'll be enjoying the little things yourself: first trips to the beach, crawling or walking through the grass barefoot, finding bugs, blowing bubbles, or just cuddles and naps outside. (And don't forget you can include your partner on these things too, just by sneaking in a kiss or making eye contact or holding hands. The simple things communicate a lot!)



## 8. CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK.

Above all, forgive yourself for not doing things perfectly. You don't have to plan the perfect summer vacation. Just make the reservation and let the trip unfold as it may. It will be more fun for everyone if you just roll with it. If you usually host a Fourth of July BBQ and you just don't want the extra work this year, don't do it. Or, ask someone else to host and offer to help. If your work distracts you on a particularly busy week, forgive yourself and squeeze in maybe an extra story at bedtime with your kiddos or make it up to them next week (remember it's quality time that matters--not quantity). The point is to soak up the good that is already happening, not forcing it to look a certain way. *Relax into it.*

***Now, it's your turn. What are your favorite ways to slow down in the summertime? What traditions or activities do you look forward to every year? What are your favorite summertime childhood memories? Leave your story in the comments!***

Do you struggle to stay present or enjoy motherhood? Do you feel like you could use a little extra support or camaraderie?

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