



School's out for summer!

As we begin the 6-week break of the school summer holidays, how are you feeling? Is the break in routine something you look forward to and relish – or have you already started preparing yourself for the inevitable struggle you will face over the next 6 weeks?

As a child, I loved the summer school holidays – come to think of it, I loved all the school holidays – no school, what's not to love?! As an adult, I can see that there was a certain order to the holidays.

My dad was a teacher and therefore on holiday at the same time as me – so no childcare was necessary. We were both early risers and so the days started similarly to school days and my bedtime routine didn't change – I still went to bed at the same time. My best friend lived across the road – so I always had company. And I was brought up in an age of no electronic gadgets – no mobile phone, no cable/Sky, no games consoles - wow, however did I cope?!

So, I still woke up early, my bedtime routine was the same – just the bit in between was different. Days were filled with outside play, inside play and the expectation was that I would keep myself entertained in one way or another.

As a parent, the 6-week break feels like something entirely different.

The inevitable calling out of "I'm bored" at least 100 times a day; the change in routine, the expectation that bedtime routines can go out of the window – leading to mornings feeling different – and the introduction of either social media, YouTube and/or games consoles. All leading to confusion, tiredness and the inevitable tantrum/meltdown – of both parent and child! To put it another way, a change in behaviour.

So how do I manage? What is different when I compare my school holiday to my child's? What can I learn – but also, what do I know?

Routine – Routine is key. It's needed for children who struggle with change; it provides familiarity and therefore safety. And as a parent, it gives me some control.

Planning – Being away of any change and how that might disrupt the day. A day out may feel like a treat, but have we planned well in advance to prepare children for what's going to be happening on the day out? Things to think about – How much notice of the planned day does my child need? Have they understood what a day trip means? Who will be there? Will there be queues? Will it be super busy? What sort of activities will there be for my child to do? What about noises, smells, etc – will that affect the enjoyment of the day.

Expectations – As a parent, we know what we expect of our children – but have we set clear boundaries? Or have we relaxed just a little too much? As an adult, I work much better when I know what the people around me want of me – but, I can't guess this – I need to be told! So, what are the expectations we have of our children in various settings – and are they clear on what those expectations are?

Time out – If you can find suitable and/or affordable childcare and your child will manage it (as a parent, choose well here!), take the opportunity to have some time out for yourself. Don't list and then do all those "essential" jobs that need doing – they can probably wait. Take a bit of time to do some self-care – take a bit of time out for yourself. It doesn't have to be extravagant, it doesn't have to take hours, but it does need to happen. We can only give our best to others when we give our best to ourselves.

Whatever you're doing, however it looks, may the school summer holidays bring you something enjoyable.

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