

child's play

Ah, the dog days of summer. While you spend restless afternoons at the course and long for the post-Labor Day

slowdown, it's easy to forget that in just a few weeks the kids will return to school.

There will be no more driving them all over town for games and swimming, no more racket in the backyard until dark, no more begging to stay over at Johnny's or Susie's on a weeknight.

During the summer, those endless requests can drive you nuts, but you know better. You know that in a blink they'll be gone, and you'll wonder where all that time went.

So rather than living a constant "Well, if I'd only ..." nightmare in the future, carve out time with the children. Ask them what they would like to do, listen to their music (even 'NSYNC or hip-hop) and take a few weeks to reconnect.

To help get you started, we have tapped into our inner-little kid to provide some suggestions.

• **Run away to the carnival** — The annual county fair is not only a good way to teach your kids how to avoid con games, it's also a time of cotton candy, funnel cakes, petting zoos,

THERE'S STILL TIME TO DO PLENTY OF THINGS WITH YOUR KIDS THIS SUMMER. SO DON'T LET IT SLIP AWAY. **BY MARK LUCE**

heat, hay and the thrills and spins of the Scrambler, Octopus and Zipper. Don't be a chicken. That couple minutes of upside down terror is worth it for the giddy laughter emanating from your child.

• **Take me out to the ball game** — Peanuts, Crackerjack, dirt and the hope — no matter how slight — of catching a souvenir all provide thrills at a baseball game. If there's not a pro team within driving distance, you can try minor league, semi-pro or even an adult amateur game. The pace of baseball lends itself to that most important link between parents and children — conversation.

• **Relive Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom** — Pitch a tent, build a fire, catch some fish for dinner and top it off with S'mores. Camping and canoeing teach children cooperation, a few indispensable survival tips and a healthy appreciation for the great outdoors. If you don't have the gear, check local outfitters or the parks and recreation center, since many of them will rent tents, sleeping bags and canoes. Don't forget the bug spray.

• **Good graffiti** — A trip to the discount store and about \$30 will yield all of the following: finger paints, crayons, sidewalk chalk, scissors, glue, markers, construction paper, water colors and a big pad of drawing paper. Add

imagination and a couple of old golf shirts for smocks, and you have hours of sometimes messy — but always creative — fun. Yes, it's OK if you can only draw stick men.

• **Build a treehouse** — There's never a bad time to begin building what your kids will call "the fort" or "our secret headquarters." Ingenuity, resourcefulness, elbow grease and a stack of wood will yield above-ground adventure and encourage your kids to be handy with the tools. To augment the new addition, help your kids plant a few trees and flowers.

• **Watch my line** — Today's coarse society doesn't always lend itself to good manners, but there's no better place to learn than the golf course. Don't nag the kids about their developing swings. Instead, let them enjoy the space and pace of the game, while subtly instructing them about fixing ball marks, letting people play through, replacing divots, who's "away" and all the things that make golf, well, golf.

• **Fly a kite** — Enough said.

Again, these are just some ideas to get you started. Let the kids decide. In the final analysis, it is not so much what you do, it's the fact that you are doing it together. Happy rest of the summer.

Mark Luce, a free-lance writer from Lawrence, Kan., will someday have kids. Until then, he'll just spoil rotten the children of his friends.

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