

Bringing Back Summer for Kids

The ongoing pandemic has kept many kids on lockdown for the past two years. Summer camps and programs might provide an opportunity to help kids catch up on missing social skills.

By Dr. Jay Berk



Maybe you have heard from your children, “The only thing I have to do is to play video games inside.” Or, “I have my friends, but they are all online.” Gone are the days of kids playing outside as much as they used to, or going to friends’ houses, riding skateboards, riding bicycles, and pickup games in the neighborhood, due to the virus.

Those seem to have been lost as we moved toward a more technology-based society. Technology is a great thing, with a balance. Without a balance it leads to children, adolescents, and adults becoming over-reliant upon it. It is easy to use and provides almost instant gratification for whatever you might be looking for, such as video games. For example, playing baseball or softball in the summer takes practice, and this is why many children and adolescents shy away from these activities, because they take work and practice. If one plays video games long enough, they get better at them almost automatically. If one practices baseball or softball, they might get better, or they might not, and might have to choose a different activity. This dynamic is why it is so easy for children and adolescents to

say, “I’d rather be on my games” than try a new activity.

Also, many children have predominantly been on pandemic lockdown for almost two years. This means many kids have skipped birthday parties, going to friend’s houses or having “play dates,” or have had a very limited number of these. Activities have been limited, such as clubs at school, or events such as scouts or sports.

With the prolonged COVID-19 virus, children and adolescents have been observed losing many life skills, or never acquiring them in the first place. This is one reason why summer camps and activities are more important this year.

Summer camp and other programs offer an opportunity for children to catch up on some of these skills. In particular, being outside this summer will allow children and adolescents the opportunity to regain or build friendship skills, develop social skills, rekindle or gain friendships, and learn skills that maybe they have lost or never acquired.

This summer, consider a camp for your child or adolescent that provides them with some of the following:

- 1. An opportunity to try new activities** they have not experienced because of COVID or other reasons. Trying new activities offers them an opportunity to gain new interests and creates a balance, rather than just video games and social media.
- 2. One that gives them exercise and activity.** In this way they can develop more motor skills that they may have been missing.
- 3. A place to meet new people.** For example, a camp that provides social support or even just new individuals they don’t see at school on a regular basis might be an opportunity to develop social skills.
- 4. Help your child develop the skills they need to be successful at a camp program.** For example, if they need social skills, involve them in a social skills group or help them with what to say to new individuals. If they have trouble playing games, or with winning and losing, help them by playing games at home.
- 5. Consider signing them up with a friend.** This companion can be a plus or a minus, in that we don’t want them clinging to that only friend, but for some children it reduces their anxiety about going to camp.
- 6. Prepare the camp for your child.** Almost every camp has a form you fill out asking about your child’s background. This includes the basics, but also gives you an opportunity to tell them a little bit about what your child may be sensitive to or need support in. Use that opportunity wisely.
- 7. Pick a camp that is appropriate for your child.** For example, some camps are staffed by high school students, while others are staffed by professionals who work with children. Depending on your child’s needs, one may fit better than the others.
- 8. Prepare your child for camp.** We all hope that COVID will reduce as the summer comes closer. However, be prepared if your child has to wear a mask, or if there are other precautions that need to be in place, and talk to them.

Dr. Jay Berk, a psychologist in Beachwood, treats children, adolescents, and adults. He runs 15 different social skills groups for children, adolescents, and adults of many ages, provides an alternative education program, and has two summer camp programs for 2022. One summer camp is for social skills/electronics, and the second is STEM/ social skills. For information, go to jayberkphd.com or socialskills360.com