Spring Break????

Or just another week of pulling out my hair?!

Melanie Miller, M.Ed.

School Counselor and Positive Discipline Trainer

This Friday would have been the day for me to get on a plane and head to Oaxaca Mexico to spend a week with a childhood friend who lives far away from me. Now, an empty nester, this was to be my first airline trip, on my own, in over 20 years. I’m sure you too had some wonderful plans…maybe a family trip, maybe friends or relatives visiting, maybe some fun camps for your kids…because you still need to work! I’m imagining the “pictures and images” of Spring Break. And now I’m imaging the reality of Spring Break….very different pictures!

Once again, a whole new set, or repeat set, of feelings can come up for you and your children. There is a lot of loss when we’re living with COVID 19. That loss is uncomfortable, but the feelings are OK.

And once you have validated those feelings and felt your own feelings, it’s time to create some fun for next week! I will share a few ideas, please take what you like and take what works for your family, your work schedule and your sanity!

Beginning the *Almost* Perfect Spring Break

This is activity is based on “Beginning the Almost Perfect School Year”, *Positive Discipline in the School and Classroom Manual*, LaSala, T., et.al., 2018, p.37.

1. Get out several sheets of paper and Post it Notes. Ask your family “What do we all want to do to make this the best Spring Break we can have despite the “Shelter in Place” policies?”

1. Write each idea on a Post It notes and stick them on the kitchen table, or any surface where you are doing this activity. One of your children can have the job of scribe. Simply brainstorm, evaluating the ideas will come later. Do not correct any of the ideas. If needed, ask “Can we do this with the “shelter in place” policy? How can we adjust this so that we are keeping ourselves and others safe?”
2. Working together, move the posted ideas into four or five groups of word/ideas that fit together. Give each group a title. For example: “Have Fun”, “Family Time”, “Food”, “Activities”, “Getting work/job tasks completed”, “Being Responsible and respectful” etc.
3. Take one piece of paper and create a template as seen at the end of this article.
4. Ask for, and have your scribe write the ideas that go in the “We say this, We do this” boxes. Ask your family “What will we actually say or do?” Encourage all to add detail so the saying and doing is very clear.
5. Complete the chart by inviting the family to come up with a Guideline. An example is “We will have some Family Time each day of break because it helps us all feel connected and loved”
6. Using a different piece of paper, draw another Template and complete another page. Do this for each topic/category.
7. Go around the family and have each member read a guideline. Ask, “Is there any guideline that you just can’t live with?” If there is one, ask that person how they need the guideline adjusted. Any member of the family can request an adjustment. Once adjustments have been made, ask the family if they can live with the guidelines. Have all family members sign the Guideline paper. Now, the creative ones can decorate it.
8. Post the Guidelines where everyone can see them and refer to the guidelines often.

When you or another family member notices someone following the guidelines, say something like “Thanks Madi for using a “Talking Ticket” (see parenting article: “Routines” for explanation of Talking Ticket) to let me know you needed to ask me something. I was able to finish my work task and now I have time to listen and hear what you need.”

When you or another family member notices someone not following the guidelines, speak with that person privately and ask them to check their behavior against the family guidelines. Encourage them to say and do what the family agreed to.

If these guidelines are supporting your family during Spring Break, meet in another week and adjust them for back to “school”.

If your family is really struggling with the guidelines, remember this is a group process. It is also a process where all voices are heard. Sometimes as parents, we’re used to making all the decisions and working with our family, as a group, can be a very different approach. Give it time. Keep checking back and revising as needed. Be imperfect, make mistakes, learn from your mistakes, and allow others to make mistakes. Give up your desire to be in control and to be the boss. Or, maybe your struggle is being the leader in the family and your kids seem to be the boss. This process invites all to participate. And when we all have that sense that we can contribute in socially meaningful and respectful ways, we behave in socially meaningful, respectful ways.

And now that you’ve created guidelines for an “Almost Perfect Spring Break”, here’s a fun idea to add!

**CAMP MILLER…or bust!**

Camp \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Put your family name in the blank) Your camp can be one evening, one day, two days or maybe all week! All activities are to be brainstormed as a family and carried out as a family. Everyone participates and everyone agrees to what is actually possible for maintaining fun and sanity!

As a family, create a theme for your camp. EG: Hawaii, Princess land, Fairy land, Legos/STEM, Disney, Nature, Ocean, Mountains.

Create a meal menu based on your camp theme. Keep the cooking simple, this is camp.

Have everyone pack a backpack of what they might need for camp. Favorite stuffed animal. Paper and markers for writing letters, a favorite camp hat, a book to read. Oh, and of course, rain gear!!

Make Camp T-shirts: Find some t-shirts and use permanent markers or fabric paints to decorate. Doesn’t need to be a new T-shirt…. find an old one and decorate the back of it.

Set up a tent or make a fort in the living room. Use this for quiet time or use it for nighttime. Put sleeping bags on beds and sleep in your sleeping bag.

Roast marshmallows on the stove, the grill or a fire pit outside. No need to go to the store just for S’mores ingredients, get creative with what you already have. Can also do banana boats <https://physicalkitchness.com/healthy-breakfast-banana-boats/> Keep the bananas in their skin, slice open the top and cut out an inch of banana, put on the toppings, wrap in foil and warm in the oven until all ingredients are gooey! There are many fun dinner and dessert ideas that can be wrapped in foil and baked in the oven…. instead of a campfire.

Watch movies that tie in with your theme.

Play an evening game of flashlight tag.

Go on a bear hunt: Walk around your neighborhood. Many homes are putting bears in their windows. Kids can look for them and count how many they see.

Make up some camp songs or teach your kids the ones you learned at camp! Sing around the fire pit or find a you tube video of a campfire and play it on your TV. Sing and enjoy your banana boats or S’mores.

Have a daily activity time. Remember how at camp the older kids taught the younger kid’s games and activities while the Counselors took a break? Ask your older children to come up with an activity they can teach to a younger sibling. Could be first aid, an outdoor game, a skill, craft or hobby. While they are teaching, you get some time to work, rest, or practice some self-care. Make videos of your kids doing the training. Share with neighbors and friends who also might appreciate someone else entertaining their kids!

Do something for our “camp” environment. Walk around the block, clean up liter…. wear gloves! Kids can spot the litter, and you can pick it up. Make a simple bird feeder. Figure out how to up your “reduce, reuse, recycle” at a time when we are creating a lot of waste.

Bunk Time! All kids need to be on their beds, or in the tent having quiet time. Just like at real camp, this is a time to write letters and read. Children can write letters or draw a picture for the relatives they are missing. Grandma or Grandpa would probably love a letter. Or, they can draw a picture or write a letter to give to a neighbor. A little encouragement for those in our community is much needed right now. Older siblings can help with this.

KP duties: Remember how everyone pitched in at camp to do the dishes, clean the dining hall, their cabins, the “bf” (bathroom in forest)? Make a job chart with all the jobs and ask for volunteers for each job. Switch up the jobs daily. Take some time for training if your children have not done such jobs before.

With your family, create a routine chart/schedule for your Camp. (See my article on Routines, if you need some guidance for this) Post it where all can see. This routine chart will be the necessary structure to a fun week. This will help keep your sanity and provide a visual reminder for children.

Keep this week light and fun. Let the house get messy, eat easy to make camp food. Simplify and turn off the overload of information coming through our technology. Leave your phone, Ipad etc. at your workspace.

**Beginning the Almost Perfect Spring Break Templates:**

**Template**  **Example**

We Will: Help each other

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| We say this…  Do you need some help with dinner?  Can you help me find my favorite shirt?  Can I join you?  You can borrow my legos.  I can help you in five minutes. | We Do this…  Let mom and dad have their work time  Use our “Talking Tickets when we have a question for mom or dad  Put down our phones when talking with each other  Give hugs  Listen |

Our Guideline is: We will help each other because it helps us get along.

We Will:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| We Say This….. | We Do This…. |

Our Guideline is: