

TAKING TIME

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Family Vacations
Isn't it time for a vacation? That's probably what you're all thinking, but when it comes right down to it, family vacations can be quite stressful. My extended family vacationed together in Wildwood, New Jersey, several weeks ago, and after being there for six hours, one of the mothers exclaimed, "Yep, it's started. We haven't been here even one day, and all our clothes are wet and everyone's sunburned." Fortunately, once we settled in, things improved.

As stressful as they can be, family vacations are important. Dolores Curran, author of *Stress and the Healthy Family*, studied families that deal well with stress. She found several common traits

among these families. These families play together. And the parents with children report spending time with their children and enjoying it. So taking time to vacation and play as a family is actually a positive stress-coping strategy. When families play and laugh together, this communicates to themselves and others that, "We're a unit; we share a history and a future."

The goal is to get past the hair-pulling tension to the laughing-together joy. The following planning principles may help. First of all, not all family vacations and family fun require a lot of equipment or a lot of money. Some don't even require much planning. As much as possible, involve all members of the family in both the planning and the vacation activi-

ties itself.

During the initial planning stage, ask each person to share two or three things that he or she really enjoys doing with the rest of the family. Compile a group list. Begin to ask questions like, "Where could we do those things? Which ones do most of agree on? How can we build this into our schedule to make sure we don't miss it?"

Using this process gives everyone ownership of the vacation. It also sets up an expectation of the vacation being a team/family project . . . not something that either the kids picked or the parents picked (and the rest have to live with it.) Why make planning a vacation a team project? This helps children build valuable skills that are prized in schools and will be prized as they enter the workforce. "Cooperating to achieve a common purpose" is a skill that they will use throughout their lives.

Make the preparations a family affair, too. Are there food preparations? Items to purchase? Packing to be done? Share the responsibilities. Cook together. Ask a school-age child to manage the list as you

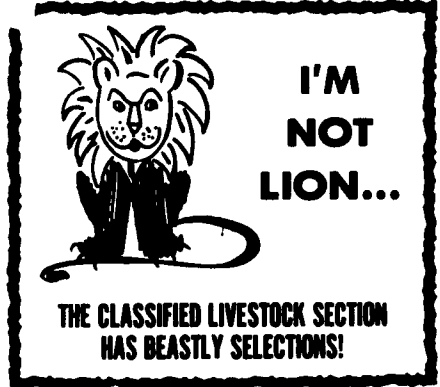
shop. Use the "divide and conquer" principle where the task is broken down into smaller jobs and each person takes several. This way one person doesn't shoulder the planning and preparation burden alone.

If there's a disagreement at any time, ask both parties to state two good reasons for and against the choice or rule. After each has pointed out both positive and negative sides, invite them to re-think the choice. Is it really fair? The best option?

A family vacation can be wonderful, or it can be miserable. You

make the difference by taking time to involve all family members in the decision making process, including some of each person's favorite activities, and then sharing the preparation work. It's not easy. In fact, it's probably not efficient either. But in the long run, you build important teamwork and stress-coping skills.

And then once the planning's over, enjoy the time away from your normal routine. If your family won't take a break until after crops are harvested this fall, clip these ideas and use them to plan a relaxing vacation on your time schedule as the season changes.



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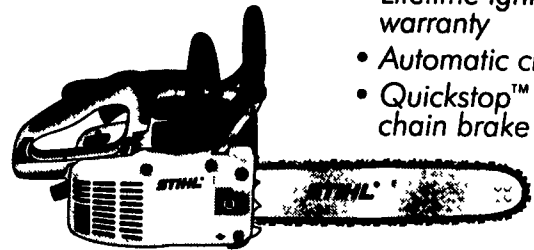


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