On Your Mind – May/June, 2018

Summer Theme

**Jonathan C. Robinson, Ph.D.**

Dear Dr. Robinson,

 With summer upon us, my kids are already singing the song, “No more school, no more books, and no more teacher’s dirty looks.” Kids look forward to summer break, while parents (moms in particular) dread it. The child care adds more expense to our budget. Having to account for our 10 and 12 year old boys all day, letting them have more fun, but still help out, keeping up with school expectations. It’s all overwhelming. Help??!

Signed,

Mama dreads summer

Dear Mama Dreads,

 My heart goes out to you, MD. You know you *should* be excited for your kids and their summer freedom, but you just see more work for yourself. Guess what. You are not alone. For family’s fortunate enough to have resources, studies show that summer time off from school can be very expensive. Add two-week summer camp per child, family vacation, extra meals and food at home, extra gas for multiple run-around trips, and summer is expensive time off for family budgets. For family’s living on a shoe string, it’s about trusting our kids to local transit, arranging day care, sign-ups for YMCA or other recreational programming, and teaching our kids the safeties and responsibilities of being latch-key.

 I don’t know your circumstances, but consider these things. First, start with a pre-emptive family meeting, where you lay out concerns and options. Get feedback from your kids, spouse, and any extended family available. Write down options for consideration. Where possible, delegate follow-up according to who benefits from the options.

 Second, list your expectations for each child. Make and post do-lists for chores, create opportunities for your children to earn extra money for extra projects. Post recreational activities as well on your family planning calendar (you have one of those, right?). Engage help from available extended family (grandparents?) where possible, with ample gratitude.

 Third, keep your child busy with chores, jobs, as well as with fun activities. Find freebies where available and age appropriate, such as various church vacation Bible Schools, free programming at your local library, and club and service options such as scouting, church children and youth activities. Be creative and include your children in exploring these and other options

 Finally, try to keep your child from withdrawing to their bedroom or couch for extensive gaming and other on-line pursuits. Electronics should be limited to 2 hours/day and balanced with 2 hours/day of pleasure reading. When you get home from work, take at least a half hour of time with each child to de-brief about their day and plan for tomorrow. These and other ideas will help you feel more productive, confident, and relaxed, so you can enjoy your summer as well.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

 My husband got a new job in another state early this Spring. It’s great for him in his career advancement and more money for us. He moved there in late March, but we decided to let our three children, ages 8, 11, and 15, finish their school years here. We’ve bought a home in our new location and the kids and I have spent several weekends with their Dad there. School is now coming to a close. Our summer vacation will not be very fun or relaxing, because we’re moving. Got any ideas?

Signed,

Frantic

Dear Frantic,

 Congratulations on your husband climbing the corporate ladder. There will be benefits in the long run, but, of course, you all need to deal with the transition and the short run.

 Good for you for finding a new home and getting in some weekends at your new digs before making the big move. The familiarity will lessen some of the grieving in transition. And, yes, this kind of move involves actual grieving. Feeling sad about what you are losing in a familiar school, friends, and neighborhood. Not knowing just how things will work out in the new place. Some anger and resentment about having no choice over the move. Lots of worry about making new friends and getting used to new surroundings.

 Make time for each child to “dump” their feelings on you. Don’t take it personally. It’s part of the transition process. This is where active listening is your best friend. Help them understand what they are feeling, without judgment, without giving solutions, and without minimizing what they are feeling. As you see their emotional fever coming down, enlist them in the moving process. Assign age appropriate duties, with your oversight, and give them praises as they help out.

 When your moving van arrives, decide which one of you will supervise the off-loading. The other of you gets to take the kids exploring their new surroundings. Find the schools, the parks, the recreational sports sits, the movie theatres, the playgrounds. If your new neighborhood has a community center with pool, take time to go for a swim and let your kids mingle with their new peers, under your watchful eye. Of course, eventually come home with pizza and drinks for dinner as a family. Assign your children to unbox their respective bedrooms, while you folks tackle your bedroom and the common areas. Expect a week to a month before everything is in its place. Don’t overdo the unpacking. Use a variation of an 8-hour work day, with start and stop times, but spend the evenings doing something fun either as a family or within new peer groups. This will be an atypical summer for all of you, but you are laying the groundwork for a smooth transition to your new location. Good luck.