On Your Mind – May/June, 2019

Summer Theme

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

Dear Dr. Robinson,

We just had our summer planning family meeting, as you have suggested, and we are at a loss. Where do we go from here? Our boys, ages 8, 12, &14, loved the brainstorming part. Lots of ideas from them, all very expensive. My husband’s company downsized recently. He kept his job but had to take a pay cut. The recent government shutdown really hit us hard. Now, our kids expect the same from us, when we really need to cut back. Maybe next year? Signed, Now What?

Dear Now What,

Good for you for putting the family meeting in play. Hope you are using this tool weekly, along with a dry erase wall calendar to log individual and family events. It’s a great way to keep everybody connected and involved.

Sorry for the financial hit you folks are having to deal with. Kids tend to get into expectation mode that sometimes doesn’t mesh with reality. With your active listening their feelings, especially the reality check and their disappointment, I think your kids are at the ages to rise to the occasion. I have three ideas for you.

First, after addressing their emotional fever and prompting with, “I have some thoughts on what we can do, do you want to hear them?” (Remember, asking permission before launching in works wonders for their actually hearing you), suggest another summer vacation-themed family meeting. This time, qualify that focusing only on what the family can afford will lower their expectations and get you over the hump.

Second, let me introduce you to the concept of a “staycation.” Potentially just as much fun and far less expensive. Staycations start every morning with the question, “So, what do you want to do today that will be fun and different?” Use a little humor to help them get into their creative spirit and, again, be conscious of cost. Ideas that are outside the box, creative, innovative, can be great fun and not costly. Try to avoid excessive video-gaming and other singular, withdrawing activities.

Finally, as time and circumstances permit, consider day trips to tourist sites in your area. I grew up near Philadelphia, PA, and never saw all the neat, tourist attractions until I became a tourist for a day as a senior in high school. Overnights are always more costly.

Hope these ideas are helpful. This summer will be different for all of you, but it can also be exquisite as you get creative.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

Is it ever okay to just be selfish? You know, do stuff for me? Summer time seems to just be about what the kids want to do and managing the chaos of their not being in school for chunks of each day. Am I a bad parent? Signed, Resigned

Dear Resigned,

Are we having a pity party here? Hey, no disrespect, but don’t beat yourself up. It may not be okay to be selfish, but being self-caring will work wonders both for you and your family. You pose an either/or question. I would like for you to consider the both/and of summer fun.

Selfish would be, I don’t care what you are doing. Take care of yourself. That’s what I’m gonna do. This is activity without consideration for the consequences of your choices. Since we are charged with “raising our kids in the ways of the Lord, so that He will not depart from them when they are old” (Proverbs 22:6), this kind of selfish hurts your kids.

Self-caring, however, is not activity-based. It’s need-based. You most certainly can tend to your needs without letting your children run wild. You need some me-time to read, go to the bathroom privately, hang with a friend for a while, then make room for these things in your days. The key is that your kids are otherwise occupied, with supervision and accountability built into the system. Depending on the ages of your kids, getting self-caring time might include arranging play dates, participating in a babysitting co-op, signing your brood up for camps, classes, hobby groups, and other short-term summer activities that don’t involve you.

When they are around and you need privacy, qualify it with, “I need some mommy time. Give me 20 minutes and I will be refreshed and more fun to be with.” This is not selfish. It’s self-caring. You are not a bad parent. As long as your kids have accountability and supervision, meeting needs can be a both/and option, and everybody wins. Good luck.