



### Plan ahead for the Summer Holidays

The summer holidays can provide a welcome break for parents and children alike from the daily routines of the school run, after school clubs and doing homework. However the length of the holiday can present concerns for parents especially on how to keep the children entertained, childcare arrangements, co-parenting, financial arrangements and how to cope when the going gets tough.

#### Keeping the children entertained

The summer holidays are sometimes a headache for parents when struggling to keep their children busy, particularly when there are children of varying age groups. Plan ahead and involve your child, be realistic. Remember that what interested your child last year may not be the same for this summer. Why not create the opportunities for some shared moments together e.g. barbecues, building sandcastles, visit to the cinema, singing songs, telling jokes, and an arts and crafts session.

Parents can feel the need to provide a constant stream of entertainment for their children and can feel let down and guilty when ultimately sooner or later their child will utter the words 'I'm bored'. A child will not stay bored for long if they are helped and shown ways to become more resourceful. As the parent you will need to set some boundaries, provide the materials, and allow your child to develop their creative play ideas, your child will benefit when you are close by and (can on occasion) join in with their play. Although children might expect others to provide their stimulation they need to be encouraged to make their own fun. Children are very dependant on 'ready made activities' and can be tempted to engage in solitary computer games for long periods of times. This needs managed.

For a comprehensive list of family events taking place over the summer the ni4kids Summer Directory provides information on things to see, places to go and fun activities to do and is available at larger supermarkets and local newsagents or visit their website [www.ni4kids.com](http://www.ni4kids.com). A useful website for local events and contacts is [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com) Local Tourist Information offices will have information on what events are available in your area and throughout Northern Ireland [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

#### Making your budget stretch

Set a financial budget for holidays. Why not go to a car boot sale to purchase inexpensive games and toys. You don't need to provide expensive day trips to help your child get the most out of their summer holidays. A visit to the local park or one further a field can provide endless fun as indeed can a walk in your local area, a picnic or a trip to the seaside. Not everything costs money get in touch with your local community centre/SureStart and look in your regional newspaper for local events and special offers. Contact local council or community group for list of activities which are free or subsidised such as a

summer scheme. When your child is attending a summer scheme don't be afraid to check and to ask questions about their safety.

Enquire at your local cinema and leisure centre about discounted rates covering the summer period. Most museums/art centres run special events or programmes during the holidays.

Translink provide special discounted day rates during the holiday for families to travel through out Northern Ireland, Tel: 028 90666630 [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)

Encourage your child to try activities which are not costly but which will provide for their health and well being e.g. cycling, walking, dancing, swimming, roller skating. Spread out the expensive outings, look at what your child's interests are and plan for these through out the summer period.

A trip to the library early in the holidays is a good starting point for a new hobby/interest or for a theme to follow. Consider keeping a holiday diary/scrap book/sketches or for planning an activity i.e. making a shopping list for ingredients for a recipe to make together. Save and then recycle your card, newspapers, magazines, egg cartons etc. for your child to enjoy fun activities at home i.e. making paper mache masks, growing cress, model making. For ideas for children's activities go on line and use a search engine such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) to access a wealth of information

#### Childcare arrangements

To balance work and family life you may require a different type of childcare to fit in with your work routine during the summer. Consider sharing childcare with a friend/neighbour this will provide some space for you and provide new interests for your child.

Children benefit if separated parents are able to co-parent and discuss and decide what the childcare arrangements will be covering the holiday period.

For support and further information, as a lone parent, contact **Gingerbread NI's Freephone Advice Helpline on 0808 808 8090**

Grandparents, relatives and friends often provide the child care solution to cover the summer period. Alternatively contact **Northern Ireland Childminding Association for available registered child-minders in your local area Tel: 028 91811015**

**Employers for Childcare can provide contacts numbers for childcare options Tel: 028 92610661**

Another option maybe to access the summer scheme's available in your local area by contacting your local council/leisure centre/community groups /libraries/museums

#### Coping mechanisms

As a parent you need to chill out on occasion and not feel guilty about this because it is important for children to understand that parents have a life as well within the family unit.

Parents can become isolated and during the summer and under pressure to stretch the family budget to keep the children occupied

If you would like help with any family issue, please ring **Parents Advice Centre** for guidance and support on freephone **0808 8010 722** or email [parents@pachelp.org](mailto:parents@pachelp.org)