

How to Support Attachment, Grow Together as a Family, and Keep Sane all Summer Long - Tips from Pathways to Permanency clinicians Kelly Pratt & Rona Sandberg.

1. **Keep some structure & routine:** Try to create and keep some structure in your days and nights even when there might not be a need for a set schedule now that school is out. Find a family rhythm that works for all family members and then do your best to maintain consistency with meal times and sleep schedules, whether on vacation or at home. Keeping some predictability and routine can help the summer months feel more relaxing for everyone.
2. **Embrace the mundane:** Do the ordinary by embracing the mundane tasks of everyday family life such as grocery shopping, gardening, caring for the pets and cooking together are great ways for newly formed families to get to know each other better. You are learning how life works in this new family together, and even routine chores can be a great way to discuss likes and dislikes, find ways to share stories and create new memories. Fun trips can be exciting- but don't worry about needing every day to be full of adventure!
3. **Explore local enrichment activities:** Everyone benefits when kids are engaged in enriching, structured activities. Summer time classes offer kids a chance to build self-esteem and competency by both exploring new areas of interest as well as enhancing existing talents and hobbies. Meanwhile, parents get a break to get some work done or enjoy a well-deserved iced coffee! Every community has a wide range of offerings from summer camps to free swim lessons to classes at your local library. For the older kids, summer jobs, internships and volunteering are great ways to make the most of their time off from school.
4. **Brainstorm a Summer Bucket List:** Discover new things together! Make a collaborative family "Summer Bucket List." Brainstorm all kinds of things to do or places to visit before summer is over and then write up a calendar so you try one new adventure per week. When kids know what the specific adventure is for each week, it can help assuage some of the anxiety that builds from trying something unexpected or novel.
5. **Build in alone time:** While family time has many benefits, be sure to find ample time for kids to have individual space to recharge their batteries and to step back from all the intimacy that summertime and vacation can bring. Building in predictable personal time, whether that is to read a book or play with Legos, can help everyone have some decompression time so you can come back together refreshed.
6. **Plan for sensory play/activities:** Sensory play is regulating and soothing for many kids, especially after the taxing sensory input that can come from long days at camp or the sometimes overwhelming intimacy that increased family time can bring. Sensory play for summer could be as simple as freezing a group of toys in a few inches of water in a tub and then using plastic tools to dig them out over time as the ice melts and softens. For younger kids, water tables or sandboxes can be great ways to have quiet time to explore ways to regulate their bodies. With older kids or teens we are often trying to help get them off the couch and moving! Some up-regulating activities for the older crowd could be swimming, indoor trampoline parks or even taking the family dog for a walk around the block.
7. **Vacations - keep expectations realistic and flexible -** Family vacations can be amazing opportunities for building memories together. When setting out for a family trip, try to set achievable expectations that are realistic for you and your kids. Take into account your child's temperament- long drives can be soothing for some and disastrous for others. Some kids enjoy swimming all day and playing in the sand while others are easily overwhelmed with all of the stimulation brought on by long days, crowds and hot weather. Allow for the flexibility to change plans whenever needed!

8. **Maintain your primary parent role when relatives visit** - Summer time often means trips to visit relatives and having lots of house guests. Even though extended family and friends may be eager to get to know your kids, try to maintain the primary parenting role to help kids feel secure and support the building of healthy attachment. Parents should be the ones to help with baths and toileting, bedtime routines and to make choices about how many desserts is too many.
9. **Plan for September's school transitions** - September will be here before you know it and so will all the transitions like new schools, new teachers, new friends and more. Try to keep one eye on the big changes yet to come by helping your kids get prepared over the summer. Consider driving by or taking a tour of your child's new school and create opportunities to get to know kids in the neighborhood or school district so starting fresh won't have to mean all new faces. All kids can benefit from practicing their academic skills over the summer whether it is through reading together or workbooks. Summer is also a great time for kids who have some catching up to do to get involved with tutoring or summer school programs.
10. **Take care of yourself, too** - Parenting is one of the most challenging, rewarding and exhausting things we do in life. Caring for children who have experienced hurt and are learning to open their hearts again requires immense dedication. Even when it seems like you have no time for yourself, try to find just a few moments to do something special just for you.

Have a wonderful, safe and loving summer!

Kelly and Rona

Rona Sandberg, LICSW is the Founder and Director of the Pathways to Permanency Program at the Trauma Center. Rona has been a staff member of The Trauma Center since 1999, has extensive experience working with complexly traumatized children and their families, and specializes in the fields of foster care/adoption, attachment, child welfare and sexual abuse. Rona couples her 20 plus years working as a trauma therapist with her experiences as a foster, adoptive and birth parent in order to provide a range of clinical services including parent and agency consultations and child and family therapies.

Kelly Pratt, LICSW, is a senior staff clinician, consultant, supervisor and faculty trainer at the Trauma Center's Pathways to Permanency Program. Kelly has worked clinically with children and families who experienced chronic/complex trauma in individual and family therapy for over 15 years. She has worked in a variety of settings including hospitals, community mental health agencies and residential programs and specializes in attachment and foster care/adoption related treatment issues. As a member of the training faculty at the Trauma Center, Kelly has provided local and national trainings on the impact of trauma across the lifespan and methods for building and supporting attachment in families caring for children with histories of complex trauma.

More information on the Pathways to Permanency Program!

The Pathways to Permanency Program (P2P) strives to strengthen and support families in providing foster and adoptive children with a nurturing and stable home. Many children in foster or adoptive homes have experienced neglect, and/or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. These traumatic experiences have impacted their ability to regulate emotions and made it challenging for them to feel safe in the world. Often these children struggle with aggressive or withdrawn behavior; difficulties in school, building friendships and/or relationships with caregivers, and adjustment to new environments; among other behavioral and emotional challenges.

P2P was developed to address the unique needs of these children and families, providing a service model that takes into account both the specific needs of foster/adoptive children as well as the overarching impact of trauma. P2P offers a range of services provided by clinicians with extensive experience working with childhood trauma and foster care and adoption-related issues.

For more information about how to receive services through P2P call Rona Sandberg at 617.232.1303 ext. 203 or rsandberg@jri.org