



Summer School for Self-Reliance

By Carolyn Nicolaysen · June 25, 2010

Summer is the ideal time for parents and kids to have fun learning the skills of self-reliance, and what better way than to find like-minded parents and form your own summer school.

Many years ago a group of friends and I took on the task of organizing a fun summer curriculum for our young ones. Although our school district had a wonderful summer school program, in order to attend your name had to be drawn, and this meant that inevitably someone would be left out.

The thought of planning a summer school may seem overwhelming, but with just a little planning you will have a summer your children will remember for years as one of their favorites. The first step in planning is to contact three or four other families and get them on board.

Step 1: Before beginning get a fresh notebook for each family to keep track of summer school plans. Gather your friends, make some lemonade, and you are ready to begin.

Step 2: Brainstorm what you would like your children to learn and determine who has the skill to teach those lessons. Don't forget that a guest speaker may be able to help you with a skill you also need to learn. Grandmas and grandpas are a great resource.

You may want to hold a class and teach camping skills, setting up a tent, making a lean-to, fishing, fire building, and foil dinners.

Or, how about a gardening class to plant "fun" foods like watermelons and carrots, as well as fast-growing foods like lettuce and radishes. Visit a farm so kids can see how farmers grow food.

You could also teach sewing – how to make a simple quilt, pillow case or apron. The boys may want to make drawstring bags to keep their Legos in.

In a pioneer class you can teach butter churning, ice cream making in a bottle, pioneer games, Dutch oven cooking, and how to have a taffy pull or make candles (take care to observe all the safety issues related to candle making – remember, they are a form of fuel, and that means risk of fire, or burning yourself on the hot wax).

Teach children the importance of a journal. You may want to make up a form for the kids to fill out each week. The form could include a memory of summer school that week, a list of

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their best friends, a favorite scripture story, and a family tree of their immediate family, with a sentence or two about everyone on the tree. Have plenty of scrapbooking supplies on hand so they can make their journals personal and beautiful. Be sure to take lots of photos to add to the journal as you go.

If your calendar includes the week of July Fourth, you may want to do patriotic things that week. Sew a flag, make a meal that is red, white and blue, learn patriotic music, tell stories about the founding fathers.

Step 3: Now it's time for each person in the group to take on the responsibility for a class. You can have a different class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday – with a different parent to teach each day. Or, each week could have a different theme, and a parent could be responsible for the whole week. Do whichever is the best for your group.

One more thing – plan a few field trips. These could be as simple as a local park, visiting the police station, or as grand as going to a water park or hands-on museum.

Step 4: Set a date. When do you want to begin, how many weeks do you want to hold summer school and how many days per week do you want to meet? Be realistic here. You will need some days to just stay home and play or run errands. Decide what time you will begin and what time you will end each session.

If someone's vacation falls in the middle, fine, just go on without them. Remember to set some dates for field trips even if you don't know now where those are going to be.

This is meant to be a teaching moment for your family and also a way to experience less stress this summer, so keep it simple.

Step 5: Set a budget. This is the hard one, as members of your summer school group may not all have the same financial resources as one another.

Decide now how much you will each spend for your "class" or put a specific amount in the pot and divide it up according to the needs of each activity. Some will cost nothing while others will require the purchase of food, supplies, or field trip expenses.

For field trip ideas contact your local Chamber of Commerce. They will have lots of information and pamphlets for travelers. I know it's hard to believe that travelers want to stop at attractions near your home, but they do. When we live close to an attraction, we often overlook these fascinating options that are so nearby. Decide based on the age of your children just how far you are willing to drive in a day, and write or visit Chamber of Commerce offices in those areas for their suggestions.

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When I was young and growing up in New Jersey our family often took the ferry to Brooklyn to visit our grandparents and other family friends, but we never stopped at the Statue of Liberty. My Nana would take me to see the Rockettes at Christmas but we never visited the Empire State Building. When we attended my husband's ten year high school reunion, I was amazed how many people said they had not been to San Francisco, even though we live only 80 miles away. I'm sure most of you have had similar experiences.

Visit AAA and get their tour guides for your area. If you aren't a member there may be a membership fee, or you can involve a friend who is an AAA member to get information for you. Ask about discounts at local attractions. They really do have the inside track. While you are there, get a few sets of maps of the areas you may be visiting. You could even use those for a class to teach map reading. Remember, after a disaster GPS may not be working and knowing how to read a map is a skill we should all have.

Do an internet search for your hometown and your state to discover things to do. This will really amaze you. You will get a big variety of sites with information not only for your hometown, but also your county and state.

Call winter resorts and other recreational destinations and ask about off season activities. Ski resorts are often open during the off season with hiking and other activities which utilize their slopes or facilities. They often host festivals to help pay the bills during the summer months.

Compile all the information you have collected into your binder. Review everyone's responsibilities and get started.

Be sure to include a night with the dads to celebrate the end of summer school.

Display the items the children have made, have the children teach dad a skill or game they have learned and have them make the food for the evening.

Summer school can be filled with fun activities that prepare kids with skills that make them capable and self-reliant in emergencies, as well as for the hands-on tasks that require a little confidence and experience as they learn to garden, cook, can, sew, and build useful things.

These activities were once part of daily life in our grandparents' generation, but are not always part of daily life for the new generation, now brought up with handheld video games and 3D television.