

## TAKE YOUR KIDS OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE THIS SUMMER



**DATE: 10 JUN 2021**

It's a nice place to be. But it might not be a good place to be... I'm not talking about a real place, but a psychological state - our comfort zone.

It's a place where things feel familiar, we feel at ease and in control but it can arguably leave us too complacent, too relaxed about our situation and not performing at our full-potential or able to adapt to changing and challenging situations.

As a parent, it creates an interesting challenge with regard to the summer holidays. Should this just be a time for our children to rest and relax or is it an opportunity for them to get out of their comfort zone, be active and feel a little challenged so that they develop as individuals. How else will they grow to become independent, resilient young adults?

### **NERVE-WRACKING AND NEW**

A common summer holiday activity is day camp. They can be a godsend for a working parent, but it can be nerve-wracking for a young child even if they have

other friends attending. There can be fear of going somewhere unfamiliar, or not being very good at new activities, or not fitting in amongst so many other new faces.

If you are facing some concerns from your child about this being beyond their comfort zone, do try and understand the underlying reason whilst still encouraging them to give it a go.

Phillipa, notes that: "Once my daughter had spent a day at camp, she was absolutely fine - and by the end of the second day she asked if she could go back the following week. She's going again this year for two weeks and it's a great backstop for us during the holidays. This year she'll be doing more activities too - mini-tennis, swimming and football, something I never thought she'd try."

### **FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE**

As your child gets older, they may be willing to try other options, perhaps a special-interest camp or even a residential one.

Frances, mother of boys aged nine and ten, sent her children to camp on their own with a more specialist provider so that they have to make friends with new people from different backgrounds to try things they wouldn't do if existing friends from home were there.

Frances says: "My younger son discovered he loves writing and showing off little skits he creates - which he did with a group of kids on the performance night they held. I don't think that would have happened had he stayed within his own set of friends from home."

### **AVOIDING UNNECESSARY RISK AND DANGER**

Travel can easily present opportunities to experience something new - and certainly family holidays can offer plenty of opportunities to try things out that are exciting and a little challenging, on land and sea.

Kids clubs on family holidays can also offer a chance to mix and mingle with other children and try new things without the foolhardy risks that can come from, say, an impromptu decision to go kayaking in the sea, hiking in the midday sun, or wild swimming in unknown waters.

### **THE JOURNEY NOT THE DESTINATION**

The ideal is to find challenges that are safe, practical and appropriate to their age and ability.

For Alison, foreign travel is more about the journey than the destination.

"Rather than fly and flop on a beach, we've started going camping. Our son doesn't mind because he gets plenty of screen time on the road, but when we stop somewhere, he gets really involved.

"Last year, we drove down to Naples, and stopped in local towns and markets in France and Italy along the way. We introduced interesting foods and new words in both languages and it has really broadened his taste-buds as well as his confidence. We would ask him to order bread and cheese and coffees for us and he would do it quite happily and the reaction from locals was always wonderful."

It also meant he was less worried about mixing with other kids at the campsite too. "Although he although he only knew a few words in a few languages - hello, how are you, my name is - he was happy enough to join in with other kids at the campsite pool and spend time playing games with them - even if he could really only talk to them when they spoke to him in English."

### **CLOSER TO HOME**

Of course, your kids can also engage in new and challenging activities closer to home. From swimming baths and lidos, to rope-climbing centres and trampoline parks, perhaps even escape rooms and theme parks, there should be plenty of places not too far from you where your children can try something new and exciting, without you needing to pack your passport.

### **TRANSFERABLE BENEFITS**

Whatever you plan for this summer, the idea of taking your child out of their comfort zone is not to inflict some kind of mental or physical discomfort on them - but to give them the chance to experience a little challenge and comfortable stretch so that they might be better ready to use their skills, thinking or judgement in working out what to do in an unfamiliar or potentially pressurised situation - whether in the exam hall, or real life.

When the summer is over, it may also be that some of the benefits will be transferred into the classroom - perhaps in their willingness to raise a hand to answer a question, to take on new responsibilities, to express ideas and solutions, or offering to help others who need assistance. These are all some of the possible psychological gains that can be accrued - leaving your comfort zone now and then, really can enable your child to be more ready, willing and able to do just that in future.

### **TOO RISKY?**

The last thing you want to do is introduce unnecessary risk and danger - and stress. Yet that's what happened when father-of-two, Alfie, took his primary-school aged children walking in the mountains in France. "The views, the nature, the climb were all great." Then as dusk fell - his mobile phone with his GPS and maps ran out of battery - and they got lost. "If I'm honest, we were all out of our comfort zone. It took us over two hours longer than planned to find the right way down and we ended up in almost total darkness."

Although he is proud of how his boys got involved and used their judgement to make decisions, it's not a challenge he's rushing to recreate. "I'll probably leave it to the Scouts or Duke of Edinburgh in future", he says.

