This summer, Rekstad says her family has chosen to simplify and reconnect, applying what she learned from a workshop on Simplicity Parenting, a movement to help parents cut down on the stresses of modern life in order to raise happier kids.


Most families, he says, look forward to summer as a break from their frantic schedules, but they find they can’t seem to slow down. Simplicity Parenting started as an outgrowth of Payne’s work as a family therapist. He saw many kids who were overwrought—feisty and defiant or sometimes sullen and withdrawn. He recommended simple changes, such as reducing the number of toys, creating daily routines and limiting screen time, and was astounded by how well children responded.

“What’s happening for so many kids is that the demands of the ‘too much, too soon, too sexy, too young world’ is flooding our kids. It’s breaching the levee. It’s spilling over into their inside world,” says Payne.

Slow down
When it comes to summer, Payne says, too many parents think they have to provide constant entertainment to make their kids’ vacations worthwhile. Instead, he champions the value of less—less buzz and boom—and more time for catching fireflies, telling stories and running around barefoot.

“The fever pitch of family life now has become the new normal,” says Payne. “In order to break the pattern of that, we need summer.”

But how do we get off the high-speed train of modern childhood and reconnect with our kids? Payne recommends starting off the summer with a family retreat. He suggests going camping, hiking or canoeing.

But how do you sustain the connectedness and slower pace you set when you get back? Payne points to another aspect of Simplicity Parenting: Setting regular mealtimes, bedtimes and wake-up times.

Another tip? Let your kids get bored. When his own daughters whine that they’re bored, Payne says he gives them a frown and says, “Oh dear.” Within 20 minutes, his girls have found something to do, entertaining themselves instead of relying on a parent or a screen to keep them busy.

“You’ve got to be the most boring thing in the room. Outbore the boredom,” says Payne.

Susan Bruck has seen this...

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