**MESSAGE FROM THE PACT TEAM**

**SUMMER**

In this, our final PACT newsletter of the 2016-2017 school year, we look at the opportunities the summer offers families, not just as a time-away-from, but as a time-to: not just a break from school stress or pressure, but as an opportunity to learn in new ways, take our recreation and leisure seriously, and deepen and nurture our family relationships. Of course, all of the general PACT principles that we emphasize throughout the school year are very much in play during the summer: knowing whom your kids are with, what they are doing, and who is supervising them. But our thinking about the summer should go far beyond keeping our kids safe from harm, and towards a positive vision of all of the ways that the summer experience can reinforce the messages that we are trying to transmit, as families and a school, throughout the year.

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**SERIOUS LEISURE**

**CASUAL LEISURE**

By: Rabbi Tully Harcsztark, Principal

For students, summer is vacation time. It is time off from school, a time without homework, without classes and without some of the other responsibilities that come with school life. It is worth noting that these are all negative characteristics; vacation is defined by what one no longer must do. In fact, that is the sense of the word ‘vacation’ itself. To vacate is to empty, to clear out. There is no doubt that ‘vacating’ from the space of hard work is refreshing and energizing. But it is equally important to note that leisure in its broadest sense is multifaceted. Different forms of leisure contribute, each in its own way, toward a rich and fulfilling life.

Robert Stebbins has spent his career studying the concept and practice of leisure. One of the distinctions that he makes is that between **serious leisure and casual leisure**. Casual leisure is “immediately, intrinsically rewarding; and it is a relatively short-lived, pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it. It is fundamentally hedonic; it is engaged in for the significant level of pure enjoyment, or pleasure, found there”. Going to the beach, watching TV or taking a nap all fall into the category of casual leisure.

Serious leisure has different characteristics. Stebbins identifies six attributes: “1) the need to persevere at the activity, 2) availability of a leisure career, 3) need

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By: Mr. Michael Courtney, Director of College Counseling

As a Head Counselor at Westchester Summer Day, one of the perks of my position is unhooking from technology for hours at a time. The focus of leading a summer camp is ensuring the safety of children and in that regard, keeping a vigilant eye on them throughout the seven-hour camp day is a priority. As we manage a staff of over 75 teenagers, many of whom are SAR High School students, we stress the necessity to avoid technology throughout the course of the day. That means refraining from using a cell phone, iPad, laptop, or other devices. We stress to the counselors that if they absolutely must send a text or make a phone call, they're free to come to the camp office during a break in the day but otherwise, their eyes and ears are on the children from the start of the day to the end. By the end of the summer, I tend to get a lot of thank you's from the counselors at how freeing it felt not to engage in technology during the day.

The entire school year is a social media rat race and it can be exacerbated in the summer evenings without the pressure of homework and studying. Students want to know what their friends around the world are up to, or they want to promote their own activities, via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat. Parents should be on the lookout, if their children are home, for signs of hours-long technology engagement. Perhaps you can encourage your sons/daughters to read a book or newspaper, engage in meaningful conversation with adults and siblings, go for a lengthy walk, visit grandparents or other relatives, learn Torah, or engage in other constructive forms of spending down time. Of course, teens emulate some behaviors of their parents and if your children see that you are consciously unhooking from devices at various times in the evenings and weekends, they will hopefully follow your example. Encourage tech-free family dinners. Maybe say no to new tech purchases over the summer. Summertime is the perfect season for rejuvenation and what better way to relax than not feel the pressures of technology?

LEISURE
(continued from p. 1)

to put in effort to gain skill and knowledge, 4) realization of various special benefits, 5) unique ethos and social world, and 6) an attractive personal and social identity". Serious leisure requires long term commitment, investment of effort, and the development of a skill. Through such activity, one often develops a distinct social network that comes with shared long term investment in something. It shapes one's life in a special and unique way.

What are some examples of serious leisure? The range is wide. In considering these attributes, we note that there are athletic, cultural and volunteer activities that fit the bill. Skiing and biking can be serious leisure activities. And hobbies...There was a time when kids had hobbies. The world has changed. Stamp collecting is much less common. But art and dance and martial arts, reading and community service, these are some of a wide range of possible serious leisure activities. And it depends how we engage a particular activity. While swimming can be a serious leisure activity, sitting by the pool is not. While fantasy football can be casual leisure, fantasy football can also lead to learning statistical analysis or appreciating nuances in strategizing and team building.

This is not simply to say that every activity has its pros and cons. It is to say that we need both serious and casual leisure in our lives to be our best selves. And it is a good idea to sit down for half an hour and take stock of the leisure portion of our lives. Do we have adequate leisure time in our lives? Are we thoughtful and deliberate in determining how to make the most of it? Are we helping our children become more deliberate about their leisure time?

As summer approaches, give it some thought. And bring your kids into the discussion as well.
SUMMER RE-CREATION

By: Rabbi Dr. Moshe Drelich, Judaic Studies Teacher and Dr. Russell Hoffman, School Psychologist

The Gemara in Bava Batra 8b informs us about an encounter between two great Torah sages, Rav and Rav Shmuel bar Shielat, a devoted and dedicated educator of small children. One day Rav found his colleague Rav Shmuel bar Shielat standing in a garden without his students. Rav asked “Where are your students? Did you abandon them?” Rav Shmuel bar Shielat replied “It has been 13 years since I last saw my garden, and even still I am thinking of my students.”

Summer vacation is something most students and teachers look forward to. Students appreciate the relief from the fast-paced routine of learning, challenging themselves, taking tests and meeting deadlines. Parents, on the other hand, might be less enthusiastic. Summer vacation can pose the challenge of unstructured time for their children. Some students will attend camp or summer programs, but most still don’t fill the entire span of vacation days. Therein lies the challenge: how to best utilize children’s free time? Should they use their free time to do something productive that will give back to their community or that will look good on their resume? Should they be allowed to be idle for some of the time and to enjoy some totally unstructured time? Is it safe for children to have totally unstructured time?

The answer may be found in Rav Shmuel bar Shielat’s response to Rav. Rav was questioning Rav Shmuel’s motive to leave his students for a walk in the garden. Rav Shmuel sought the opportunity to walk in the garden as a means to recharge and refresh his creative energies. The purpose of the walk was to benefit his students. Summertime is a time of recreation. Rabbi David Aaron points out that the word recreation can also be read as re-creation. Unstructured leisure time can feel like wasted time, but it can also feel like an important, meaningful component of the ongoing process of learning and growing. The slower pace and less hectic schedule of summer vacation can be a time of reflection, rejuvenation and reconnection. In this way, it is akin to the rest and reflection of shabbat, which is an integral component of creation/productivity.

Summer break can offer parents and students alike the opportunity to recharge and refresh their creative energies. And, for students, this recharging can be both a break from, and an integral part of, their academic endeavors. Summer vacation can also be an opportunity to strengthen and expand the bond and love between parents and children. This is especially true for adolescents, as the relationships between parents and their adolescent children need to grow and adapt as teens mature and approach adulthood. During less structured vacation time, we can re-create our relationships with ourselves, as well as with our children. This is something to keep in mind as we consider how to help our children make the best use of their vacation time, and how we can provide some guidance and, perhaps, at least some minimal structure for their time. We can encourage our children to mindfully embrace their unstructured time, and to appreciate it for the re-creation that it can provide. Taking advantage of the opportunity to spend time with our teenagers during the summer can be immensely rewarding. You might find time for activities that are harder to fit into the schedule during the pressured school year, such as playing, listening to and/or making music, talking, cooking, learning, drawing, shopping, etc. Spending this time together can be an investment in the relationship that pays off during the school year when they need that bond to be strong. Even connecting with your adolescents via social media can have a more playful and relaxed feel during the summer. And if you find yourself frustrated by your couch-bound teenager who is watching tv on a beautiful summer day/night, in addition to urging them to get outside and get active, you can also settle in and join them. Watching tv or movies with your teens can also be a rewarding shared experience. (For tips on how to make watching tv with your kids more meaningful, see this article from the Child Mind Institute: https://childmind.org/article/benefits-watching-tv-tween-teen/)
I have spent my entire teaching career in high school. Years ago, at Parent/Teacher Conferences, a parent asked for some advice about dealing with her 16-year-old son, and I distinctly remember thinking, “What do I know about parenting teenagers? My oldest is four!”

Well, now I am the parent of two high school students, and if anything, being on the parenting side of things has made me feel even less qualified to dispense advice. Parenting teenagers often feels so complicated, so fraught, and so difficult to bring our best selves to. I know I should be wise, and patient, and calm—but he/she pushes my buttons just so, I take the bait, and off we go.

The summer gives us an opportunity to connect or reconnect with our kids in a deep and fundamental way, removed from some of the stressors of the year. There are no immediately pressing school deadlines, no practices and games, less rushing around. We have the opportunity to have agenda-less time with our kids—time not to accomplish goals or plan schedules, but just be.

It’s enormously important that we take that opportunity, and that time. As Rabbi Harcsztark said to the school community in his drasha on the schoolwide Shabbaton this year, family relationships are built in the kitchen—not necessarily in the high-profile moments that are captured on camera, but in the quotidian time spent together just living our lives.

This can happen on a trip or vacation, but it doesn’t have to. The essential ingredients are time, focused attention (as per Michael Courtney’s article in this newsletter, putting down our devices is essential), and relaxed agenda-less-ness. As we barbecue together, hang out together, road trip together, we build the connections that sustain us when we go back to our busy school-year lives, once again driven by the calendar and the schedule.

In my family, this happens most over our annual summer camping trip. (Well, my kids camp. My husband and I sleep in an RV or a cabin. We’re not much for roughing it.) We spend every night sitting around a campfire, talking about nothing important, enjoying the outdoors and the fire, and just decompressing. As much as possible, we try to put work, and our electronic tethers to it, entirely aside.

Adolescence is a time of pushing and pulling; of our kids asserting independence from us as parents and then seeking our help and protection. Parents often think their kids aren’t interested in them, in what they say or how they view the world. (Parents often think that because our teenagers tell it to us, frequently.) But in studies, teenagers cite their parents as the greatest influence shaping them and their values. Our kids want our attention, our focus, our engagement, our just-being. Summer lets us find time and mental space to connect and reconnect with our kids in a less busy and pressured environment. Doing so shifts summer for our kids from being a time of not—not-school, not-homework, not-usual-routine—to a time when something very important and constructive is taking place.

As parents, we don’t have to have the one right answer that will solve all the problems. (There isn’t one, anyway.) But we have to find the time to invest in our relationships with our teenagers, and the summer gives us great opportunities to do so.
Summer break. Time to recharge and refresh. But what does that mean for students who are expected to shift back to academics come September?

When my children were little, I would take them to art museums and I would have them look for the ink blot test; that very large painting that covers an entire wall and seems to have been made by throwing paint at the canvas. We didn’t talk about form and color or about the artists who painted the works we passed, but they would stop and look at various works of art and I would sometimes read the placard with the artist’s biography, or some other pertinent details related to the work, if they seemed particularly interested in a piece. Instead of a lecture on art, they were engaged in a game to see who could find the ink blot first, and yet they were learning so much about art along the way. While it’s true that they did not end up with an encyclopedic knowledge of art, they did come away with an appreciation for art and museums in general. The goal was to expose them to both the content and a means of expanding their own knowledge as they grow older. To both learn and learn how to learn on their own.

Many an article has been written about the benefits of time away from school and an equal number have been written arguing that students “lose” some of the progress they have made when they are away from consistent instruction. In reality, every child is different and some truly do need the time away from classes and exams to process what they have learned, while others would benefit from opportunities to review and master material.

If your child is eager to take classes over the summer, or to participate in an internship, follow their lead. If they are working or attending a summer camp program, let them focus on the skills that come with their job or program. If they just want to catch up on their sleep and their shows, or are between school and camp, there are other ways to encourage learning without fighting over how to fill their time. Choose a book to read as a family. Talk about applicable current events that tap your child’s interests. Take a trip to a museum and look for the unusual rather than the expected. Whatever you choose has the potential to increase vocabulary in a natural way, develop new ways of thinking about the world around us and engage your child in learning without the rigors of school. But most importantly, let your child lead. Let them find the right balance between vacation and learning so that they are ready to resume classes in September.
STING NATION - SHOW YOUR STRIPES!!

Rabbi Harcsztark and other members of the SAR High School Administration and Staff will kick off summer visits to camps in July, bringing with them warm smiles, words of cheer and great spirit wear!

We can't wait to see you!

#summersting

It's not just what you learn. It's who you become.

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