

## Yes, now is the time to start making summer plans!

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**W**ith winter weather upon us, thoughts of hot, sunny days and summer camp might seem far away, but now is actually the ideal time to get your plans in order for your kids' summer adventures. Many summer programs announce their schedules this time of year, giving you the opportunity to be first in line for some of the more in-demand camps and classes.

When that final school bell rings in May, many families find themselves in a familiar predicament: What can their kids do while parents are at work? Early planning can mean the difference between a memorable and meaningful summer spent in enriching activities and a summer spent staring at screens. There is nothing worse than finding the perfect camp for your children, only to learn that it was fully booked months ago. Here are some tips to help you get organized and coordinate the best summer ever.

To get started, plot out each week that you will need an activity for your students. Do you need a supervised activity every week of the summer, or do you plan for your kids to spend some time at home? Can you make arrangements for your children to go to a half-day camp, or will you need a place where you can drop them off in the morning and pick them up on your way home from work? Are there any plans already in place that you need to work around, such as a family vacation or a week spent at Grandma's house? Are your kids OK attending a camp on their own, or do you need to coordinate with a friend so they can attend together? Once you have determined your family's needs, you have the framework you need to start planning.

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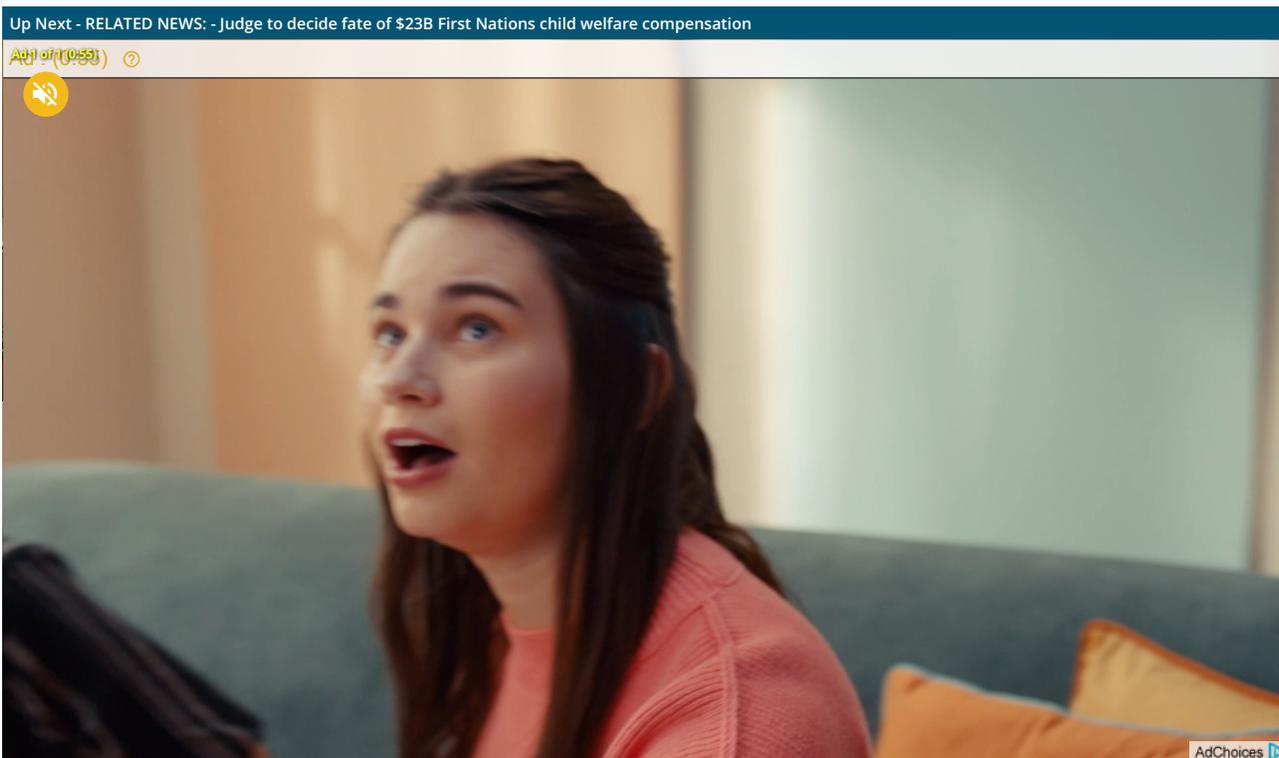
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Gather information from area organizations about their camp offerings. No matter their interest, there is something that is certain to provide a fun, exciting (and even educational) experience for your kids. Weeklong camps offer an opportunity for kids to explore new interests and try something new. Longer camps allow students a chance to dive deep into a topic they are passionate about and want to learn more. Omaha offers a wide variety of summer camps, from performing arts camps at The Rose, camps to spark the imagination at the Omaha Children's Museum, educational camps with a historic twist at the Durham Museum, outdoor adventures with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Aim for the Stars math and science camps from UNO, and so much more. Most organizations publish their summer camp schedules between January and March, so start watching for this information now.

With your weekly grid and the various camp schedules in hand, you are ready to start putting the pieces of the summer puzzle together. Start with one or two camps that your kids are most excited to attend. With these "must-do's" on the calendar, consider plugging longer, multi-week camps into the schedule. Finally, look for weeklong or shorter camps to fill in the remaining weeks. Be sure to plan a few second choices; popular options often fill up quickly and you may need a back-up plan if you find yourself on a waiting list for a camp.

Putting these steps in action, here is an example of how summer plans may come together: Looking at your summer, you know your family has a one-week vacation planned in July, leaving you with seven weeks of time you need to plan. Your daughter's number one choice is a three-week production camp happening in June at The Rose. You can round out the rest of her schedule with a weeklong super sleuth camp at the Durham Museum, at STEM camp at UNO and an outdoor adventure camp at Fontenelle Forest. Your daughter is looking forward to a summer she'll never forget and you can rest easy, knowing you have a solid plan for keeping her active and engaged throughout the summer months.

Even as the winter weather howls, some early planning can ensure a bright summer ahead, filled with memorable moments that are sure to make it the best summer ever. Let the planning begin!



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