

Summer Planning

Tips for Parents and Caregivers



Summer brings exciting opportunities and changes in routines, especially for youth who have aged out of day programs and camp experiences. This resource offers practical tips from peer supporters (who are also parents and caregivers with lived experience) to help you and your youth build structure, support independence, and make the most of the season. From organizing daily activities to accessing local resources, you can use this guide to create a safe, positive, and enriching summer experience for your family.

What can I do to support myself?

Build Your Own Support System

- Connect with other families who “get it.” Peer support can reduce isolation.



Parents for Children’s Mental Health

Interwoven Connections

PLEO

- Build a trusted support network. Engage neighbours, friends, and family who can check in with you. Plan the concrete ways that they can help support you.
- Connect with faith communities or peer networks.

Organize and Plan Ahead

Consider funding or support options:

- Ontario Autism Program (OAP)
- Kerry’s Place Respite Flex Funding
- Local Region or Developmental Services
- Community Living

Ask school staff (e.g., EAs) if they are available or interested in summer work.

Explore staffing options:

- Summer placement students (CYW, DSW)
- High school volunteers needing hours

Book an IEP meeting with the school before and after the summer.

What can I do to support my child or youth?

Structure, Planning & Independence

- Work with your youth to organize the day, creating a predictable rhythm that leaves space for unstructured downtime.
- Involve your youth in planning—this builds ownership and reduces resistance.
- Use prompts and post the schedule in a visible location.
- Use a calendar to mark off completed days.
- Prepare written instructions or short videos for daily tasks.
- Build on their strengths—choose activities they enjoy and do well.
- Break down large tasks into manageable steps.
- Practice routines and public transit together.
- Use [social stories](#) to prepare for transitions and reduce anxiety.
- Assign simple responsibilities around the house and/or neighbourhood.
- Celebrate successes—start and end each day positively.

Emotional Wellness & Connection

- Create a calm-down space with comfort items, fidgets, and soft lighting.
- Help them express emotions through journaling, music, art, or video creation.

Physical Activities

- Incorporate movement—walk, stretch, dance, or exercise together.
- Schedule short activity breaks to release energy.

Digital Safety & Support

- Discuss safe online habits and schedule social screen time.
- Talk about location sharing for peace of mind.
- Use apps and tools such as clocks and timers to manage time and screen usage.

Mealtimes & Nutrition

- Encourage regular meals and hydration to support mood and energy.
- Involve youth in prepping meals or grocery shopping.
- Prepare lunches in advance and label by day.

Community & External Supports or Experiences

- Explore local supports:
 - Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario
 - City recreation programs
 - Specialized developmental services
 - Libraries and community centres
 - Faith-based or cultural groups
- Encourage participation in job or volunteer opportunities to help build skills and routine.
 - Explore [Canada Summer Jobs](#) for opportunities.

Set Up for Safety

- Develop a safety plan with your youth
 - Include emergency numbers and instructions.
 - Create door answering and phone answering protocols.
 - Use doorbell or indoor cameras if needed.
 - Use location services on devices where appropriate.
- Save crisis lines and support contacts in your phone.
- Create an [Emergency Contact Plan](#) and post key phone numbers where they're easy to access
- Create a [Behaviour Support Plan](#)
 - Anticipate triggers and identify calming strategies.

Prepare for Back-to-School

- Schedule a transition visit with the school before the first day, allowing your child or youth to tour their classroom and meet the teacher.
- Ease back into a routine in mid-August and start making the home environment more predictable. For example, encourage your youth to gradually shift their bedtimes and wake-up times, and prioritize a good night's rest.
- Visit our [School Mental Health Backpack](#) for more back-to-school tips

Watch the Webinar

[Summer Planning: A Fireside Chat](#)

