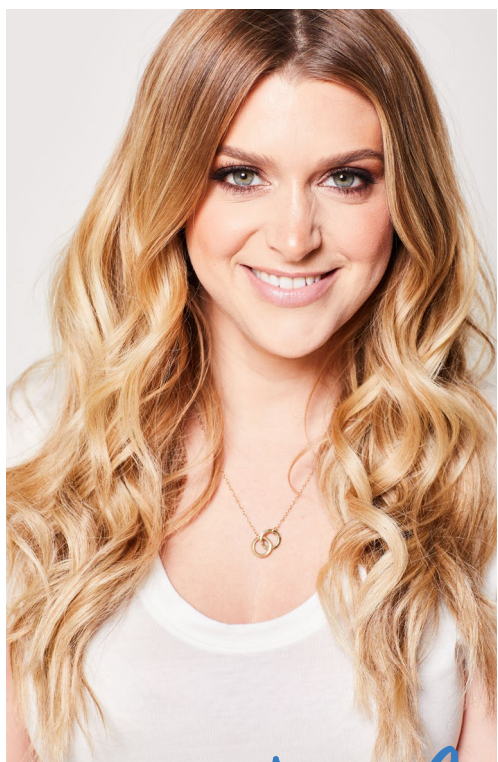




Are you ready
to create happy
memories?



Love Anna

Anna Williamson
Broadcaster,
Author and Life Coach

Have you read?



Anna Williamson's book Breaking Mum and Dad: The Insider's Guide to Parenting Anxiety

Summer can be wonderful – it is, after all, a time of warmth and family; holidays and sunshine. Yet it's also a time when many parents can find themselves under additional pressure. This might be due to juggling work commitments with childcare, or providing entertainment for the family when the bank balance is already stretched.

As someone with experience of anxiety as both an individual and as a researcher and author, I'm interested and invested in how families are recovering in the wake of a challenging year, where the things that are important for our mental wellbeing – such as nature, family and the wider society – have been taken away from us.

But as hard as that period has been (and it has been hard for so many of us) it's important to find ways to reconnect with loved ones, rebuild lives and move forwards.

That's why I'm pleased to be sharing this Creating Happy Memories Summer Activity Pack with you. It celebrates everything positive about family life while also taking a bit of pressure off parents by providing simple, practical activities and guidance for navigating the summer.

Families are amazing – not always perfect but often resilient, adaptable and loving – and I know that we can put a difficult year behind us and create new happy memories together.



#CreatingHappyMemories



@familyaction



@family_action

We'd love to see how you're creating happy memories this Summer so please use the hashtag and tag us for a chance to be featured in our stories and inspire other families!



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Super summer bingo

Information and inspiration for an entire month!

Bingo prize!



If you manage to get a bingo line across or down or even a full house you could win a Red Letter Days family treat! Send your photo proof to creatinghappymemories@family-action.org.uk

Visit the library

Water fight!

Create pavement chalk art

Go on a family bike ride

Make ice lollies using juice

Do a science experiment at home

Set a LEGO or DUPLO challenge

Camp out in your garden

Play frisbee

Make bird feeders for your garden

Play a board game

Blow bubbles!

Pick up litter

Build a den

Make smoothies with fresh fruit

Write a story

Make pizza from scratch

Create a music playlist

Send a letter to friends or family

Count your change jar (and maybe spend it!)

Shoot a film on your phone or tablet

Post an activity on social media with #CreatingHappyMemories

Bake and decorate a cake

Kids make dinner

Go swimming at a local pool

Treasure hunt

Sort through your old clothes for recycling and second-hand shops

Bowling

Visit a new outdoor space

Picnic!

Learn a new dance using an online video

"No screen" day



Take a photo every day of your super summer fun and tag us with the [#CreatingHappyMemories](#) hashtag? Why not print your photos to make a scrapbook or photo album. What a great way to preserve your precious memories!

Summer planner

There are lots of inspiring ideas to try in this pack – use this handy chart to plan out each week over the summer.

Inspiring ideas to try this week

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

The weekend!

Green fingers and learning

If you're feeling inspired to get 'green fingered' this summer, but don't know where to start then don't worry – we've got you covered.

Top tips

- You don't need a garden, by growing in pots you can make your windowsill into a mini greenhouse
- You can find great advice about growing at home from the [Royal Horticultural Society](#)
- Growing vegetables is a great way to get children excited about trying healthy meals
- Growing sunflowers is a great challenge for children. Whose sunflower will grow the tallest? Turn gardening into a fun family contest.



Grow at home

Our team at the Child and Family Support Service in Carlisle created a "grow at home" activity pack during lockdown last year. We asked them what parents should gather to make packs at home, as well as their top tips for getting children involved.

What you'll need:

Containers: These can be empty yoghurt pots, milk cartons cut in half, or clean plastic packaging. Make sure you make some holes in the bottom for drainage though!

Compost/soil: Pick up small bags of compost from supermarkets or just gather soil from your garden

Seeds: Available from supermarkets, local grocers, garden centres and even pound shops. Vegetables that are perfect for balcony gardens include tomatoes, radishes, carrots, fast growing salad leaves, peas and beetroot

Diary: Although not essential, diaries help children to see how far they've come, can help younger children develop maths and art skills and give you a repeatable activity to engage in throughout summer as you chart how their plants have grown.

Did you know?

A sunflower is not just one flower. Both the fuzzy brown centre and the classic yellow petals are actually 1,000 – 2,000 individual flowers, held together on a single stalk.



Share with your community

Here are some great tips on how to share your love of gardening within your community.

- Buddy up with friends or neighbours and their children to start a "seed swap" group. It's a great way to make growing more affordable and sociable
- Why not have a doorstep planting competition where the families on your street create a display around your front doors? This is a nice way to develop community spirit and brighten up the local area
- Local social media pages and marketplaces are a great way of getting hold of cheap or free plants and people often offer free spare plants like tomato or courgette plants, which are easy to look after
- The charity Garden Organic has a master gardening programme which connects local volunteers with their communities to give advice and support new growing - you can find them at www.gardenorganic.org.uk



Tag @family_action and #CreatingHappyMemories



Read a book



Fiona Woodcock, the author of "Poppy and the Blooms" recommends "Barbara Throws a Wobbler" and "The Boy who Loved Everyone".

"The first is a very funny, clever and sensitive exploration of emotions and how to control them while the second is a beautifully observed story about the power of kindness".

Fiona's top tip:

Remember there are books on absolutely every subject out there. Always ask booksellers and librarians for advice as they will have the perfect book for your child. Often that one book can open up a lifetime of reading.

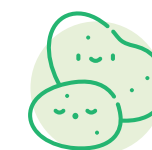


Build a den (outside)

The best place to build dens outdoors is in a forest or wooded area, where large sticks, twigs and branches can be leaned up against trees or (if you're ambitious) lashed together into a frame for your den.

- Make sure an adult is around to supervise if you choose this method, as some sticks and branches can be quite heavy and dangerous
- Gardens can also be fine for a den, particularly if you have spare wood lying around from a recent DIY project. We've also seen some fantastic dens which have been constructed using the tubing used in plumbing as the frame!
- You could opt for a wigwam-style den, where several strong twigs or branches are secured at the top with twine or string for a makeshift frame, and leaves, twigs or (if you're cheating) tarpaulin used for the walls to make it cosy
- Finally, you can always stack twigs or branches against an existing wall if you're feeling a bit overwhelmed by all the options or your frame keeps collapsing

Don't forget that mud is a great (if not a messy) material which can be slapped on your den's walls... remember that the whole point of dens is to create a place outside the rules, so children will love getting messy. For the reasons listed above we would, however, recommend practical clothing!



Grow a potato tower

This takes a bit of work but is a good excuse to work together as a family, ticks all the boxes – educational, visually impressive, active... and it even helps you put lunch on the table!

1. Put an old tyre (or wooden box if you can't get hold of tyres) and fill it with potting compost
2. Find a potato and look for the eyes where the potato will spread shoots
3. Put the potato into the soil with the eyes pointing toward the sky
4. Put a second tyre over the first and add more compost (or just add more compost if you're using a wooden box). There should be about 5-6 inches of soil above the potato.
5. Keep the potato well-watered and within a few weeks, you should start to see green shoots. Keep adding compost, leaving about 5cm of foliage showing
6. Once the potato flowers have died down carefully scrape the soil and see if you have grown any potatoes!

"Whether you have a garden or just a small outdoor space like a balcony, a simple bit of gardening can bring positive benefits to your mental health."

Family Action RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2019 Partner and green space provider idverde



Tag @family_action and #CreatingHappyMemories

Out and about

Fresh air and nature are good for the soul and they're also free! Here are some ways to engage with your family while you're out and about this summer.



Crayon rubbings

This is one of the simplest activities you can do with younger children and can be done anywhere you might find leaves.

It's also very satisfying, and can produce some beautiful images for around the house.

Things with an interesting texture make great crayon rubbings so challenge children to find different shapes and sizes of leaves on the ground (not picked from the trees!).

They can then place the leaves they've found between a hard surface and a piece of paper and rub the crayon gently over the paper until the shapes and textures of the leaves show through.

Gentle sweeps using the side of the crayon work best, building up the colour gradually.

To make a game of it, set a timer for them to find as many different leaves as they can.



Make rock art

If you're out and about in your local woods and see a flash of colour it might be flowers or fruit... but it also just might be a painted rock hidden for you to find. Digital Artist Grace decorated rocks during lockdown and here are her top tips for those about to rock!

1. Keep it simple – try to keep to one large, simple idea for each piece. This is also much easier for younger artists
2. Don't sweat the small stuff – I use acrylic paints and a sealant to ensure that the rocks survive the weather, but if your kids are just painting for the joy of it then don't be afraid to just use pens, crayons, or whatever is to hand
3. If you or your children like the idea but don't feel like you want to paint you could always focus on writing inspirational messages or quotes on the rocks instead
4. Why not share the joy? – there are plenty of hidden rock Facebook groups around the UK that you can find with a simple internet search, but even if there's nothing in your area you could write instructions on the rock itself, telling people to post to social media, or simply to keep and cherish your creation
5. If your family has more explorers than artists, you might be able to find info about potential pebble locations on social media. Just remember to re-hide them afterwards!

Creativity inspired by Covid

A combination of Covid-induced creativity and social media has resulted in a flowering of creativity where people decorate rocks and pebbles and hide the treasures around their local areas for others to find and comment on.

Digital artist Grace got the bug for stone decorating when she had a lot of free time at the beginning of lockdown after she lost her day job. She noticed that people were sharing photos of painted rocks with a hashtag on social media, leaving them out for people to find, and so decided to do some of her own (pictured).

Make patterns in paint or write inspirational messages on your pebbles





Build a mini beast hotel

Building a mini beast hotel is a great way of encouraging diversity in your garden – here our friends from idverde show us how.

1. Choose a suitable spot. It needs to be on level, flat ground. You can put the hotel in cool damp areas or in dry sunny spots depending on the type of guests you want to attract!
2. It's best to build a strong, stable frame that's no more than a metre high. The best way to do so is by laying bricks in an H shape on the ground and stacking wooden pallets on top. The open nature of the pallets means that there's plenty of room within the stable frame for the next step
3. Fill the gaps in the frame with natural materials such as wood, pine cones, leaves, stones or sand... if it's natural then it's probably perfect! It's fine to have plenty of smaller and larger holes as animals of all sizes like to book a "room" there!
4. Like any good hotel, you're going to need a roof – this can be any type of material, but if you want to keep your hotel green you can put rubble or gritty soil on top. This allows your hotel to blend right in and who knows... you might even get wildflowers whose seeds have blown in on the breeze growing there
5. Surround your hotel with plenty of colourful, nectar-rich flowers so the butterflies, bees and insects you attract have plenty to eat!

Did you know?

Did you know an adult ladybird can eat 5000 aphids (small sap-sucking insects) in its lifetime?



Be a detective

Even the most urban environments see their fair share of nocturnal visitors from the animal kingdom... why not turn detective and try and capture evidence of their visit?

- Make a sand trap by putting damp sand on a tray with some bait in the middle (cat food should do just fine). Make sure you get your children involved by getting them to decide where might be the best place to leave it to attract animals – near a fence maybe? By some undergrowth?
- Place it out in the evening and check again in the morning to see if the food has gone and if there are any prints on the tray
- You can then have some fun researching animal prints on the internet to find out who your visitor might have been!



Go on a cuddly bear hunt

For a fun activity that also sparks young people's imagination, a cuddly bear hunt can't be beaten. Simply hide a selection of small teddy bears around your garden or even an area of a park for your children to find.

- Once each teddy bear has been hidden they should note down where they found them (e.g. Big Ted was underneath the willow tree; Little Ted was in the herb garden near the mint)
- You can then use the conversation to discuss what the bears were doing and even draft stories about it
- A note of caution... truly treasured soft toys and comforters should probably be left out of this game, just in case.



Making food fun

What better way to interest your children in food than making it a fun experience for the whole family to get involved with together?



Edible paint

Most parents of younger children will be familiar with the panic that comes from paint brushes brought too close to tiny mouths. Don't worry, we've got a solution that's safe, and also perfect for older children wanting to do something a bit different... after all, when was the last time you could eat a painting you'd completed?

All you need for edible paint is some food colouring and Greek yogurt. Simply:

1. Put two tablespoons of yogurt into a pot and add a few drops of food colouring to make the desired colour
2. Mix a few different colours in different pots
3. Depending on the age of your children you can paint with brushes on to a plate or simply use your fingers - a great method for younger children who want to "decorate" their highchairs!
4. Top tip: Some food colouring can stain, so although it's safe for tiny mouths you may still want to put down a sheet to protect your floor or table.



Make cress heads

This activity helps bring families together by creating a series of growing cress heads. It's a lovely thing to return to throughout the summer... and can even be used as a way to grow ingredients for a meal. Here's how to get started.

1. Have boiled eggs for breakfast!
2. Clean your empty shells
3. Paint on a face with paint, felt tips or permanent markers
4. Fill it with dampened cotton wool to just below the surface
5. Sprinkle with cress seeds
6. Keep inside on a windowsill, returning occasionally to check the cotton wool remains moist
7. In around a week you should have a batch of cress.
8. (Optional) use this in an egg sandwich... the cycle continues!



Have a picnic

We've pick(nic)ed up a few tips to help organise a magical day out that you might not have thought about:

- Check restrictions at the location you're planning to use – a lot of parks have bans on ball games and BBQs, which might be a deal-breaker for your family
- Remember to take a ball, frisbee or other suitable game if you've got particularly active children... and at least one willing parent to play along or act as referee!
- England isn't known for consistent weather, so check your weather app and organise special outings in July or August to improve your chances of sunshine
- Make sure everyone knows whether you're providing all the food or, if not, who's bringing what. This stops you from having far too much, or hundreds of bags of crisps and no fruit!
- Make sure everybody brings the essentials – a blanket, a chair and some food and drinks if you're sharing.



Tag @family_action and #CreatingHappyMemories

Rainy day solutions

We all know that summertime weather can be unpredictable - so it's good to be prepared with a few indoor activities.



Build a den (indoors)

The joy of an indoor den can be summed up in one word – chaos! Children love taking their homes to pieces to craft a space of their own, so be prepared for some mess.

- Because these dens are indoors, we can't bring branches and trees in from outside, so we need to improvise
- Chairs often make a great foundation for a den – the simplest den could consist of just a duvet suspended around four chairs, for example
- However, to make it feel truly special consider removing cushions from your sofa, or even taking the mattresses off the beds. Two mattresses stacked against each other make a great makeshift tent, and huge sofa cushions make excellent doors or roofs
- Once again, the appeal of dens is the transformation of the ordinary, so even doing something as simple as turning a table or sofa upside-down can be hugely exciting for children who have grown used to their environments.



Make a piñata!

This concept is a hit with children worldwide, so why not create one to enjoy too? It's basically a decorated paper mache sculpture filled with treats.

1. Blow up a balloon as large as it will go and tear several newspaper pages into strips
2. Make the paper-mache paste in a bowl and dip the newspaper strips into it. The paste is really easy to make – simply mix equal amounts of flour and water together until there are no lumps
3. Spread the newspaper onto the balloon until it's completely covered, making sure you leave a small hole where the balloon is tied so you can fill the piñata. Add a few layers so it's strong enough to hold the goodies – letting each layer dry before starting the next
4. Paint your piñata in bright colours and when it's dry you can hang tissue paper streamers from the bottom. Then fill with treats - you could go for some healthy options such as little packets of raisins.



Materials:

- Large, round balloon
- Newspaper
- Paper-mache paste
- Paint
- Crepe paper
- String or yarn
- Masking tape
- Treats to go inside!

Rainy day solutions



Read a book



Fred Blunt, Author of "Santa Claus vs the Easter Bunny" recommends his two favourite books from when he was a boy. "Where the Wild Things Are" and "Not Now Bernard."

"There's something about monsters that capture the imagination of a child and I think in some way these two books inspired my latest book Lionel The Lonely Monster too. Looking back, I certainly knew how to spot a classic as a young lad!"

Fred's top tip

Do a silly, improvised version of the slightly dull early reader books the school has sent home. My kids used to beg me to do the silly version, but I'd insist that they read it properly first, so it became a bit of a reward for their reading. They both read brilliantly now and I'm always shouting up the stairs for them to turn their lights off and put their books down!

For more heart-warming book ideas take a look at our [summer reading list](#).



Tag @family_action and #CreatingHappyMemories

Juggling for parents

Most parents and carers know that keeping several balls up in the air isn't just an activity you engage in at the local park! Here are some suggestions for how to look after your mental health while you do so.

Many families will continue to have to work while their children are off school over summer. It can be difficult to juggle childcare, house chores and work responsibilities, so here are some suggestions for how to look after your mental health while you do so.

Time management is hard... but necessary

It takes about 25 minutes for anyone to become focused on a task and we learn best in 30-minute chunks. What this means for us in our roles as parents, carers and employees is that switching back and forth constantly isn't the most effective way to get anything done.

Therefore, it might make sense to try and plan your day so that you can maximise the time when you have support with the children or even just let them have a little screen time. For some jobs you might even be able to implement a "one hour on, one hour off" rule regarding work – the solution can be as flexible as your situation.

Of course, in some cases, it might not be possible to do so. If this is the case, it's important to remember that you can't do your best work in this situation for all the reasons we've discussed and show yourself a little kindness – anything you get done is a real achievement!

Get into good habits at work...

Although many people have returned to work after lockdown, there is still a lot of uncertainty around what the summer will look like. With many childcare clubs yet to open a lot of parents will find themselves having to continue to work from home, which can make separating work and home life difficult.

Our brains use subtle clues from our surroundings, such as the environment, clothing and even the rituals around our morning coffees to switch modes and get into the right mindset.

Working at home means you often aren't physically moving from your home to your office and are skipping all the unconscious cues that help us get into the right mindset.



With this in mind, you could develop some new rituals to help your brain switch between home time and work/school time. These might include:

- Making the fancy coffee you usually have on the way to work
- Getting a physical diary and handwriting your tasks for the day to help ritualise the day's beginning
- Working in a room you rarely use to relax in.

...And at home

The same thing that's true for work is also true for home and so setting up family rituals that reinforce that it's playtime for our children (and ourselves) can be valuable.

For example, consider:

- Switching the furniture round at the day's end or the weekend
- Putting fun activities in a calendar or diary so children can look forward to guaranteed family time
- Relaxing some of the rules around playing computer games or even getting dressed on those days or times you've agreed to let it all hang out!

A school-shaped shadow over summer?

While enjoying a laid-back summer many parents' minds will drift towards worry about their children's return to school following a tumultuous year. Here are a few things to consider that might help set your mind at rest...

- Research on “embedded learning” shows that we learn best by doing, as we better grasp why a task is important, which makes it more motivating. You can harness this by following your children's lead – pay attention to what they're interested in, help them to follow their instincts and keep their love for learning alive over the summer
- Trust the process! Parents will be completely aware that children will let their hair down over the summer and will still be dealing with the fallout of nearly a year of home schooling. Our educational experts work with teachers and schools on a daily basis and trust us; they're doing everything they can to hit the ground running when schools return after summer
- Try to continue your child's sleep routine if possible throughout the summer, as this will mean less adjustment upon the return to school
- Make yourself available to your children and occasionally check in with them about their thoughts about returning to school while playing or having fun. This will help you to identify any worries or challenges they're considering so you can address them with the school or discuss them further with your child
- Go easy on yourself and your children. We've all had to endure a lot this year, and it's natural to want try to take back control. But the best armour we can give our children and ourselves is positivity and kindness. Put your wellbeing first and the rest will take care of itself.

Have you heard?

Anna Williamson's Breaking Mum and Dad Podcast on Instagram.



Get connected

If this pack has whetted your appetite for summer activities, then don't worry...
There are plenty of other great resources online:



Family Action's Family Craft Hub Programme in Staffordshire hosts loads of amazingly creative how-to guides on its [YouTube channel](#).



The Woodland Trust knows a few things about getting out and about and offers hundreds of downloadable activity worksheets for children of all ages on their [website](#).



The Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Watch [website](#) is good for learning about the natural environment, but it also has a range of fantastic activities – including lots that can be done inside when the weather's not up for playing along!



Take to the skies with the RSBP's website, which has a range of educational online games for kids (although with names like "whose poo?" they're still suitably gruesome for youngsters suspicious of education!). Take a look [here](#)



Amphibian and reptile groups of the UK (ARG UK) has some great resources under the "info and advice" section of its [website](#) – including fact sheets, colouring exercises and an activity pack.



The National Trust has a comprehensive list of their top 50 summer activities for adventurous families, so if you're feeling in the mood for adventure read the list on their [website](#).



The Eden Project also contains lots of fantastic activities on its brilliantly titled "[stuff you can do](#)" page.



Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families and brighter lives.

We provide innovative and effective services and support to many of the UK's most vulnerable people, helping individuals and communities address the challenges they face through practical, emotional and financial support.



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