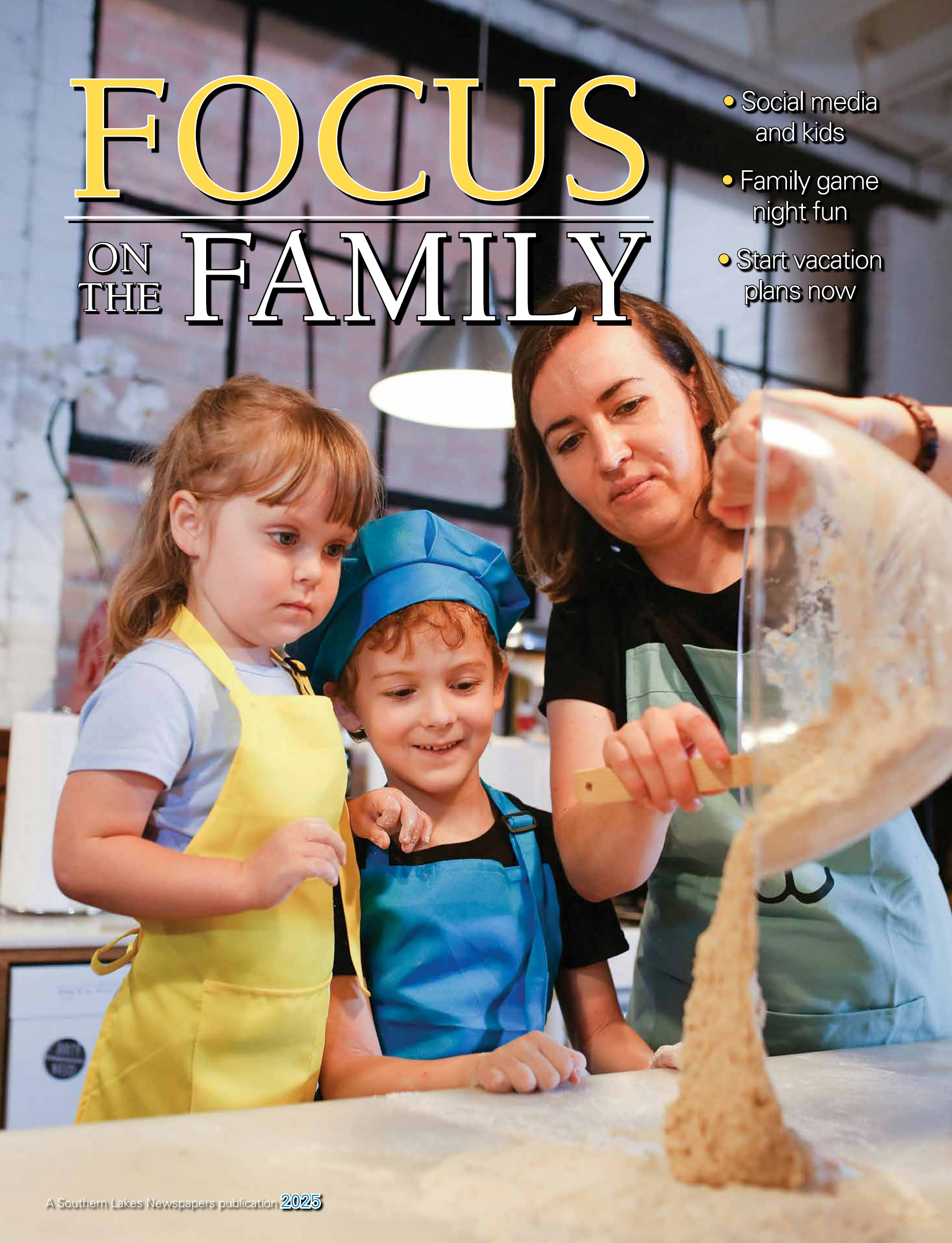


FOCUS

ON THE FAMILY

- Social media and kids
- Family game night fun
- Start vacation plans now



How social media affects kids' mental health

Social media has become such a key component of most people's lives that it is easy to think that it has always been there. SixDegrees, created in the late 90s, was the first social media site similar to the format known today. When it shut down in a few years later, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook soon took root.

The University of Maine reports there are now 4.8 billion social media users worldwide, representing 92.7 percent of all internet users. And according to the recent American Family Survey, 96 percent of parents say their kids have access to at least one social media platform. Many use multiple online platforms daily.

Although social media may have originated as a means to bring people together, there are many who argue that it actually does the opposite. Instances of cyberbullying, which is a form of online harassment, have grown as social media has become more pervasive.

Some experts believe that mental health concerns are an unexpected side effect of increased social media use, says Johns Hopkins Medicine. In fact, in the spring of 2023, United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, released an advisory that suggested social media is harmful to young people. In 2024, Murthy called for a surgeon general's warning label on social media not unlike the warnings on cigarette packages.

How might social media affect children's mental health? Here are some of the main concerns.

• Changes in a developing brain: According to the Surgeon General's report, children's brains go through a highly sensitive period of development between the ages of 10 and 19, when feelings of self-worth are forming. Frequent social media use may affect these feelings as children compare themselves to others they see online. In addition, functions like emotional learning, impulse control and emotional regulation may be affected.

• Development of depression: Johns Hopkins Medicine says research has demonstrated there are high rates of depression attributed to very low social media use and very high social media use. Finding a healthy balance might not be as easy as it seems.

• Addiction: There is some evidence that children become addicted to checking social media,



Help kids develop healthy device and media habits

What are TikTok's privacy settings? Can parents control what advertising their children see on Facebook? How do parents limit the amount of time their children spend on Instagram?

A new parent tool, the Glossary of Digital Media Platforms, offers the answers and will be handy for parents of children trying out new phones or other tech-related holiday gifts.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health developed the free resource, which contains detailed information on popular digital platforms, including Apple, Discord, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok and X, with more to come.

"Parenting around media can be so challenging," said Jenny Radesky, MD, FAAP, co-medical director of the Center of Excellence. "Figuring out what apps and settings are best for your family is an important part of the conversation. At the center, we created the Glossary of Digital Media Platforms to make it a little easier for parents to learn about each app and figure out what settings and tools exist to keep their kid safe while connecting online."

Users click on a platform to learn about its default and customizable safety

settings; messaging and friending controls; screen-time management settings; parental controls and more.

Parents aren't the only ones looking for assistance when it comes to the online world. Pediatric providers, teachers and others who work with children and teens can introduce the glossary briefly during clinic visits, back-to-school nights, in newsletters, or other communications and encourage families to have conversations about safe and balanced relationships with social media.

The tool can also facilitate conversations on concepts like private versus public accounts, time limits and how to block or filter upsetting content.

Here are some examples of how the glossary can be used:

- If children have iPhones, parents can learn more about the Family Sharing feature, which includes settings to limit who a child can contact, downtime/do-not-disturb settings and the Ask To Buy option that requires a parent to approve purchases.

- If social media and notifications are distracting teens at night, families can use the glossary to look up apps and how to silence notifications or activate other nighttime settings.

- For teens who are stressed out by negative content on social media feeds, the

glossary contains information on tools to curate feeds and block and filter content.

- If a child's school has a phone policy, families can look up device or app settings to silence distracting apps during school hours.

The glossary joins a roster of resources available at Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, which includes conversation starters for parents concerned about how their children are using social media.

The center's activity cards can help young children build healthy relationships with media and their devices before they grow into teens and young adults.

Megan Moreno MD, MEd, MPH, FAAP, co-medical director of the Center of Excellence, urges parents and other adults to avoid taking a doom-and-gloom approach when talking about the sometimes-dangerous social media landscape with kids.

"We can give ourselves grace for these initial reactions of worry and fear, but we have a choice to make on what we want our reaction to be going forward," Dr. Moreno said. "We can choose open-mindedness. We can choose curiosity. We can choose evidence over hype, and we can stay centered on our children and families."

(STATEPOINT)

Developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence on Social Media, a new parent tool, the Glossary of Digital Media Platforms will be handy for parents of children with phones or other tech-related items. The free resource contains detailed information on popular digital platforms.

ISTOCK/DIRECTORS Focus on the Family



A recent study found families are only spending six hours a week together, which is less than an hour each day. Furthermore, they only eat meals as a household four days out of seven. One way to increase time together is to create a recurring family game night.

METRO CREATIVE Focus on the Family

Raise the stakes of family game night

Follow these tips to make it a can't-miss activity

Getting the entire family together can take a little effort. There is no shortage of activities that pull family members apart most days of the week, from work obligations to sports practices to school events.

The media provider Independent recently reported on a study of 2,000 parents with children at home. The study found families are only spending six hours a week together, which is less than an hour each day. Furthermore, they only eat meals as a household four days out of seven.

Eking out more time for family may be as easy as scheduling activities that everyone can rally behind. Family game nights give everyone an excuse to gather at least once a week.

These tips can make family game night a can't-miss activity.

START SIMPLE

The first step to a successful family game night is choosing the right game to engage all participants. This can be challenging when there are young children, teenagers, middle-aged adults, and even seniors participating.

Visit an independently owned toy and games store and pick the brain of the proprietor. He or she will likely have some suggestions to get you started. As participants become more comfortable, you can branch out with games.

CONSIDER MOVEMENT

Game night doesn't have to mean sitting around a board game, which young children who have trouble sitting still may characterize as a "bored" game.

Games that get people moving, whether it's charades, drawing games or a game such as Twister can be more engaging.

Game night also can take activities to a golf driving range or an arcade.

RECURRING EVENT

Set a firm day of the week for the game night. This way participants will block out that date and time and make every attempt to attend. Treat game night like any other important appointment.

THE RIGHT REASONS

Game night should focus on having the entire family together laughing and competing in a good-natured way.

It should not be a strict competition where winning is the only goal. Avoid the potential for sore losers who can sour game nights in a flash by letting everyone know that fun is the foremost priority of the night.

OFFER PRIZES

Encourage participation with the lure of prizes at the end. Prizes will not just go to

the overall winner. There can be humorous awards, such as the player who messed up trivia questions the most, or the one who rolled matching pairs of the dice most frequently.

You can customize the winning categories depending on the game played so everyone gets a fighting chance at a prize. Keep awards simple, like candy bars or other appealing treats.

NAME A 'GAME MASTER'

Every game night should feature a game master who presides over the rules of the game. The rules can be the ones strictly off of the information sheet, or the ones you customize for your own fun.

The game master's job is to make sure the rules are enforced, but also to determine when it's alright to let things slide.

Family game nights are a vital way to bring everyone together at least once a week in a manner that is entertaining and fosters solid family relationships.

(METRO CREATIVE)

2025 Focus on the Family

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Crafts are a lucky bet for St. Patrick's Day

While it certainly can be fun to visit a pub and raise a pint in honor of St. Patrick's Day on March 17, such efforts are not necessarily a family-friendly way to commemorate the patron saint of the Emerald Isle.

Thankfully, there are plenty of activities for children and adults that focus less on imbibing and more on hands-on fun so everyone can be involved equally. Crafting often fits that bill.

The following are some unique craft ideas to celebrate the spirit of St. Patrick's Day. Many of these projects include items you may already have around the house.

SHAMROCK KEY CHAIN

Find your favorite salt dough recipe and use a shamrock cookie cutter to cut out the shape of a lucky clover. Poke a hole at the top where you can connect a key ring.

When the shamrock is dried and hardened, paint it in a vivid shade of green. Attach keys, a school ID or anything else to the key ring, or simply hang it from a backpack.

LEPRECHAUN HATS

With a little green paint, green card stock and construction paper in black and gold, anyone can create miniature leprechaun hats.

Paint the toilet paper tube green, then wrap the bottom in a strip of black and

place a gold "buckle" made out of a rectangle of gold or yellow paper. Glue the tube to a round of green card stock, and voila, you have a perfect leprechaun hat for decorating a room or table.

EASY RAINBOW CRAFT

Grab some fruity O-shaped cereal and let kids sort the colors into red, orange, yellow, green, and purple.

Glue rows of these colored cereal rings onto a piece of white cardstock to make the rainbow. At the base of the rainbow, glue some cotton balls to serve as the clouds.

BEADED BRACELETS

Visit a craft store and stock up on small green, white and gold beads, as well as some bracelet wire or poly string.

Spend a few hours making bracelets that everyone can wear with their green attire for St. Patrick's Day. The bracelets also can be given as gifts.

SHAMROCK SLIME

Those who can find green glitter glue and shamrock confetti can turn their favorite slime recipe into one worthy of St. Patrick's Day.

RAINBOW CEREAL BARS

Incorporate some of the marshmallows

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



There are plenty of activities for children and adults that focus on hands-on fun so everyone can be involved in celebrating St. Patrick's Day. Crafting is one way to do so and there are many projects that feature items you may have around the house.

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Tricks for planning your summer getaway

Summer is a popular time of year. Boasting balmy temperatures and a relaxed atmosphere, summer can seem like a months-long vacation, even for those who spend time at home lounging around the pool or soaking up some late-afternoon rays on the patio.

Even if life at home is a little more laid back in the summer, many still are eager to go on vacation and embrace those feelings of rest and relaxation.

Navigating family members' schedules and competing for time during this peak travel season can complicate summer vacation planning.

Thankfully, these tips can make scheduling that summer getaway a little easier.

START PLANNING EARLY

It's best to get a jump-start on vacation planning early in the year. In fact, you might want to make it a New Year's resolution. The early bird gets the worm, so booking early can ensure you won't be caught paying more by booking last-minute. Narrow down your list of desired destinations, choose a spot and start pricing out travel and accommodations. If

you find a great deal, book it.

IDENTIFY YOUR BLACKOUT DATES

Likely there already are some things on the calendar that are unmovable, such as kids' summer camp schedules or high school or travel sports practices. Take a calendar and block out any can't-do dates as soon as you know them. This helps to identify the days and weeks that are free.

SET PRICE ALERTS

Many travel sites enable you to set up search parameters so that you'll get automated messages with deals that match your budget. Keep in mind that some airline sites may track your search history, and prices may fluctuate if you keep checking out the same flights. Clear your cookies and cache or use a different computer or tablet for each search to get the most competitive price.

CHECK FOR WORK CONFLICTS

Before booking a trip, ensure that others in your department will not be out on the

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



Navigating family members' schedules and competing for time during summer travel season can complicate vacation planning. That's why it's suggested to begin the process early in the year, which can also help families snag better deals.

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• **SOCIAL MEDIA** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

which can lead to addiction-like behaviors in other areas. According to The Addiction Center, a Web-based substance abuse resource, addiction to social media is driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on that impairs other important areas of life. Fear of missing out is another threat to kids' mental health.

• **Exposure to inappropriate content:** Social media may introduce children to content and images that are not appropriate for their age levels and capacity to understand and interpret. According to Murthy's report, deaths have been linked to suicide- and self-harm-related content, such

as risk-taking challenges or asphyxiation content. Viewing this content normalizes these behaviors for some youngsters.

• **Low self-esteem issues:** Children and teenagers who compare themselves to others' carefully curated online profiles (which usually are not telling the whole story) can develop feelings of inadequacy and body image issues.

Although plenty of good can come from social media, parents are urged to exercise caution when giving children access to these platforms, which can affect kids' mental health in negative ways.

(METRO CREATIVE)



Some experts believe that mental health concerns are an unexpected side effect of increased social media use, says Johns Hopkins Medicine. In 2023, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, released an advisory that suggested social media is harmful to young people.

METRO CREATIVE Focus on the Family

• **CRAFTS** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

from a favorite "lucky" cereal brand into the mix of rice cereal treats to give them a rainbow-inspired upgrade.

POTS OF GOLD

If you have leftover plastic witches' cauldrons from Halloween, paint them

gold and use them to store foil-wrapped chocolate coins. Otherwise, tie green helium-filled balloons to the cauldron to make a perfect centerpiece.

St. Patrick's Day crafts get the entire family in on the fun of celebrating the Emerald Isle.

(METRO CREATIVE)

• **SUMMER GETAWAY** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

same days. Often companies frown upon having too many people out concurrently because they need to keep the work flowing. It's best to float your vacation days with coworkers or a supervisor well in advance to ensure there are no conflicts.

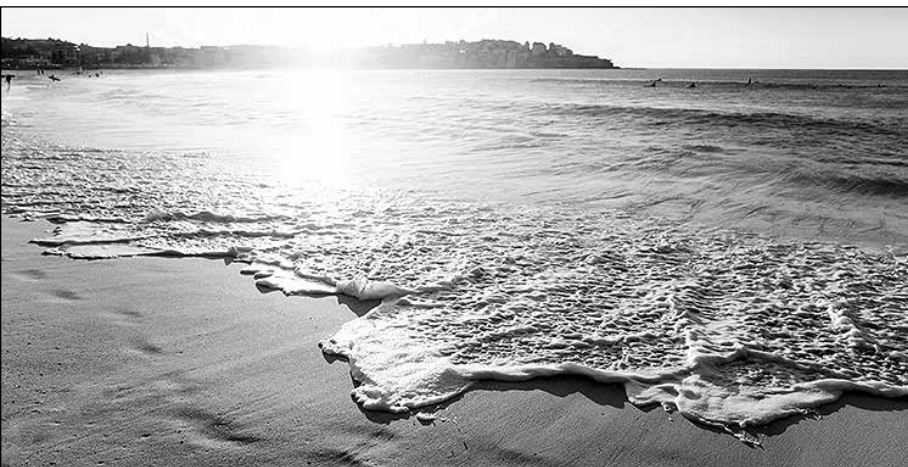
DELEGATE SOME OF THE WORK

Ironing out all of the details of a vacation means having many moving parts, which can be stressful. Farm out

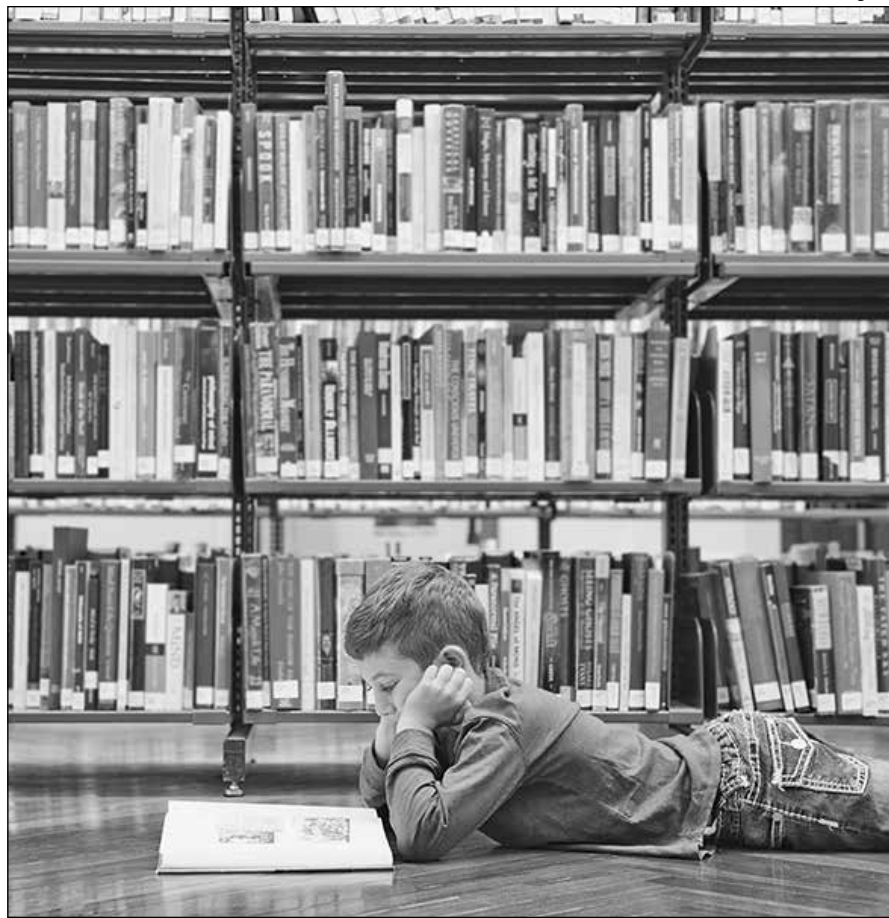
some of the tasks to others in the family or your group of friends depending on who is traveling together. One person can be in charge of researching transportation, while another can secure rental cars and still another can figure out meals and any excursions while on the trip. Breaking up tasks makes it collectively easier on all.

Winter is an ideal time to plan memorable summer vacations.

(METRO CREATIVE)



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Make the most of your local library

Local libraries are invaluable resources for residents, including students and their families. The value of libraries has been recognized for far longer than many may realize.

The Franklin Public Library in Massachusetts, opened in 1778, is considered the first lending library in the United States. Since then, libraries have become integral components of communities across the nation and even the globe.

It's easy to overlook a local library, but residents who resolve to make the most of these venerable institutions can do so in the following ways.

• **Get or renew your library card.** The first step to making the most of a local library is to sign up for or renew your library card. Each member of the family, including children, can get their own card, which affords access to books on site and often additional texts and offerings the library can request from other branches.

• **Acquaint yourself with all the offerings at your local library.** Books may be the first thing people think of when pondering local libraries, and modern branches still maintain extensive catalogs of books spanning the genres.

But libraries also offer more than books. Film fans may be surprised to learn libraries typically have extensive catalogs of films that can be borrowed on DVD, and some even allow movies to be streamed through library-affiliated streaming services.

Libraries also offer services to adults, including seniors, and children that can range from tax preparation tips to passport application assistance to craft projects for youngsters.

• **Utilize the research capabilities of local libraries.** Card members have access to a wealth of resources at their local libraries, and that includes research databases like JSTOR that might require paid subscriptions if users try to access them on their own.

These databases can help individuals grow their knowledge about the world they live in and prove invaluable to students young and old who are conducting research for school projects.

• **Open doors to new career opportunities.** Many libraries offer career counseling services free of charge.

These can be particularly useful to prospective small business owners, recent graduates looking to get a foot in the door in their chosen field, and even mid- and late-career professionals who want a change but aren't sure where to begin.

• **Grow your social network.** Not all social networks are grown online. Community-based events and programs sponsored by and hosted at local libraries can be great places to meet neighbors with similar interests.

Local libraries are more than just places to borrow a book. Residents can utilize an array of services to make the most of their local libraries.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Libraries have become integral parts of communities and have much to offer families. Borrowing books, while still an option, is just one of many ways to take advantage of these resources.

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