

*Dear OU parenting,
I find that parenting during the summer in Israel is really difficult. I have kids of different ages, and each year we struggle to find activities for them that everyone is happy with, especially as my wife and I both work full time. We also get into arguments because I have to say “no” to things they want to do, either because I don’t have time, or because I think that it may not be safe. I would like to have a smoother summer, but I’m not sure how! S.D.*



Dr. Ethan Eisen

Dear S.D.,

Thank you for sharing these challenges, as they are likely on the mind of many parents across Israel, if not around the world. With the school year ending, parents feel increased pressure to ensure that their children have productive vacation time, which can be even tougher when the parent or parents in the home are not free to coordinate all the summer plans due to work or other considerations. Also, as kids get older and have greater autonomy with less supervision, safety issues are of concern to many parents, especially for *olim* parents who may not be accustomed to these cultural realities.

I have heard from many parents about the confusing and time-consuming process of figuring out summer options for our kids. How often do we find out about a program that would have been great for our child, only to find out that registration is closed or the camp is already over? This challenge is systemic, and while it can certainly be frustrating, knowing that you are not the only one struggling with this may be a little comforting. Although it is certainly too late for this summer, perhaps as a community we can consider how to make information more accessible to people around Israel so that they can make the best choices for their children’s summer plans.

A large part of successful summers is parents managing their own expectations. Between balancing work responsibility, constantly shifting schedules, financial concerns, and wanting to provide enriching experiences for your children, it is understandable that this can be stressful. A bit of self-compassion can go a long way, acknowledging that you are doing your best to juggle all the responsibilities.

I want to focus on one particular aspect of your question—the arguments that can arise when children want to do something, and you, as parents, are not okay with their requests. This can be relevant to younger children who want to go somewhere, but you do not have the time or the activity does not fit into your budget. It may also arise with older children who want to go somewhere with their friends, but you determine that their plans do not account

for safety concerns that you have. A sentiment I often hear from parents is that they are hesitant to say no or place restrictions on their kids' activities because their child will get upset, or feel sad that he is missing out on the friends' plans. They have FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) and use the YOLO argument (You Only Live Once), trying to get you to change your mind and maybe even feel a little bit guilty.

But as the parent, it is both your right and responsibility to see things that the kids, even teenagers, just do not see. They are interested in the excitement, fun, or novelty that they imagine in their minds, and they do not see the drawbacks of safety, expense, strain on the family, or other factors that may be at the forefront of your consideration. As such, you are allowed to say no, even if they are disappointed. Of course, ideally there can be a conversation about why you reached your decision, allowing your child to express his perspective on why he disagrees with you, and how you can find a suitable compromise moving forward. But these conversations start with your knowledge that you are allowed to say no, and your child being upset about that decision does not mean you are making the wrong choice. Hopefully with the right balance of boundaries and fun, this summer can be enjoyable for you and your kids! ■

Dr. Ethan Eisen, PhD is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist (Israel and U.S.) offering Evidence-Based Solutions for Individuals and Couples

Feel free to send in any parenting questions you may have to parenting@ouisrael.org (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).



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- Encourage your kids to read books throughout the summer.
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