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## **Fun places to go and things to do that are cost free**

Many families are interested in learning about inexpensive activities for family fun. There are many activities and places to go that are easy on the pocketbook, are energy efficient, and provide shared time with family members. Some ideas are new ways to enjoy family time and others may be old standards that were popular when adults were youngsters.

Today, the popular term is “Staycations”; an opportunity to have a family vacation right in your own backyard, neighborhood, or town. Many of these family fun activities can be enjoyed at any time of the year, while some may be specific to a season. These ideas have the whole family in mind including young children and family elders (grandparents, great-aunts or great-uncles). You might even come up with your own ideas—just ask yourself, “what can we do to have fun together?”

### **Right at home—**

- Try reading aloud for half an hour one evening a week. Everyone can take turns.
- Have a special meal once a week. Even hamburgers are special on good china and by candlelight.
- Get out those games. Monopoly, Scrabble, Go Fish. Have older children help the younger children. Include grandparents.
- Invest a few dollars in good quality lawn game equipment—croquet or badminton.
- Plant a garden—it saves money, provides good nutrition and exercise.
- Have a photo night—get out the photos and mount them in books or make a collage.
- Make holidays and birthdays special by making gifts.
- Build a snow fort or snow man together in the back yard. Go sledding or take a walk in the snow.
- Make a backyard feeder station for birds, squirrels, rabbits. Provide winter protection with the used Christmas tree or trimmed shrub branches.

### **Around your neighborhood—**

- Spend some time at your local city park. They provide play areas, walking paths, baseball fields and more for free family fun.
- Use your local library—it's free and offers many activities as well as good books.
- Take a neighborhood walk—family members can take turns being the nature guide by pointing out nests, identifying trees, watching the wildlife.
- Bike down the many trails that are available in the Washington County area. Trail maps are available at <http://www.wbachamber.org/overall%20trail%20map.pdf> and [http://www.co.washington.wi.us/uploads/docs/CountyParks\\_2009.pdf](http://www.co.washington.wi.us/uploads/docs/CountyParks_2009.pdf)
- Attend a sporting event—baseball and other sports take place in neighborhood parks.
- Invite your neighbors to a potluck dinner. Providing space and a dish to pass is a great way to have a meal and enjoy good company—all at no charge.

### **In Your Community and Beyond—**

- Learn about Wisconsin art by visiting the Museum of Wisconsin Art in West Bend. For a small fee you can view ever changing exhibits. Go to <http://wisconsinart.org/>
- Visit historical sites—there are many in Washington County that are cost free or low cost. <http://www.historyisfun.com/index.php>
- Explore a Washington County Park—plan a picnic and enjoy hiking, biking, snow activities, swimming, fishing, boating and much more, available for a full day or just a few hours. Go to <http://www.co.washington.wi.us/departments.iml?mdl=departments.mdl&ID=PAR>
- Watch your local newspaper for free community events in your area. Service clubs provide great events for families, as do churches and schools. Parades, community picnics, the county fair are great inexpensive events.

Some final tips—take lawn chairs for those who need seating. Pack a picnic lunch, but keep it safe with a cooler and ice packs. Go early to get the best locations for the event. Take sunscreen and keep umbrellas handy. Elders will enjoy being included, but be sure to allow extra time and consider accommodations for them and young children.

All family members will enjoy these free or inexpensive activities. These are just a few suggestions to get you started thinking about activities for the whole family. Do some family brainstorming to come up with more ideas. Activities shared with the whole family will be remembered with pleasure and may provide a helpful model for your family's *next* generation of parents and children.