

SUBSCRIBER-ONLY NEWSLETTER  
**Jessica Grose On Parenting**

OPINION

# The Wonderfully Mundane Joys of Summer

July 30, 2022



Image by Ed Jones via Getty Images



By **Jessica Grose**

A few weeks ago, The Wall Street Journal had a feature about parents who were [splurging on summer fun for their kids](#) — expensive birthday parties, all-out road trips — in part to make up for the joy lost during the early days of the Covid pandemic. It’s an understandable urge. Our [kids missed out on a lot](#) over the past few years; why not spoil them if we’re able to?

But my kids don't seem to have been looking for a summer spectacular. Rather than desiring the extraordinary treat, they seem to be absolutely tickled by getting to do all the normal things this summer, without interruption. Sleeping over at a friend's house, mundane in 2019, has a special gleam to it now. Picking them up from school is a mixed bag in terms of their day-to-day moods, but when I pick them up from camp, they're buoyant — chattering away about the kinds of wholesome activities (Kickball! Color wars! S'mores!) that one imagines in superficial dreams about having children, the kinds that would end up in a glossy brochure about parenting.

Perhaps the happiest I saw them, though, was on a family trip to Coney Island. If you've never been, it's not a Disneyfied theme park. It is the opposite of fancy. I say this with love, but it is perfumed with hot garbage, like many parts of my adored New York City in the summer. And yet I've never seen my children so elated, experiencing the transcendently pure childhood joy that's so hard to recapture as a grown-up. My oldest discovered roller coasters and couldn't get enough of [the famed Cyclone](#). I almost wish I could bottle that feeling of freedom and serve it to her as a seaside cure for anxiety.

This year, I asked readers about what they planned to do this summer to help their kids find some of that boundless joy. Here's what they had to say:

*I have committed to long, lazy days at the pool. My kids love it — they are free, comfortable, happy to play (and thankfully, spend their endless energy). We're doing a few trips this summer to see family and friends we've been away from for too long, but the pool will be our source of joy. Simple and easy. Ice cream and pretzels during adult swim. Layers of sunscreen, chlorine, pool water and very few rules. They can be kids fully and wholly.*

— Ashley Latimer, Silver Spring, Md.

*The summer joy for our family will be a vacation we missed the past two years: to return to my husband's boyhood summer town, where his father (an artist) and mother (an author) spent every summer starting in the late 1960s. We've realized that making family memories is so important, and that extends to building family history.*

*During the pandemic lockdown, we went through years of old photos, and because of it, our young adult children pushed for us to honor their grandfather's legacy by showing his art to honor his 100th birthday. (He died in 1986.) Each of our kids is helping to make this happen, something that may not have been created if we hadn't lived together 24/7 during 2020. An art gallery will be showing his work.*

*My children never knew their grandparents, and seeing so many people lose loved ones over the past years has made our children want to hold on to legacy and capture stories.*

*— Karen Rappaport McHugh, Santa Monica, Calif.*

*I love the idea of kids and pure unadulterated joy and think about it a lot. A lot of it is the small things. Just this week, I enjoyed watching them run heedlessly through the playground sprinklers. A few days before, we spent four hours sitting in the playground sandbox digging with plastic water bottles.*

*For a big summer trip, we are visiting Yellowstone with my wife's college friends. From my own experience visiting as a 5-year-old, I know the park itself will not be a highlight for the kids — that's more for the parents. But for them, the highlight, the moments of pure joy, will be playing with the other kids. Our friends all have kids roughly the same age, and in our annual reunions, the tribe of kids takes over whatever rental we are staying at and has a blast.*

*We will also take a smaller trip to the beach. It's a joy to watch the kids enjoy the sand all day, finding delight building sandcastles or turning over rocks, watching little sand crabs scurry away.*

*— Ben Ho, New York City*