Sun, sea and sand

If you're going to the beach this summer, whether just for a day, or for a longer holiday, you'll love these ideas to help make your time together fun and memorable.
From ‘thinking pebbles’ to sand writing, to beach art, there’s plenty that all the family can enjoy together to make the most of the summer sun.

**Pebbles**

Little children love to pick things up – what looks like something very ordinary to an adult can become a real ‘treasure’ to a child. So why not spend some time enjoying these ordinary treasures together: you could set the impossible task of trying to find two stones that are absolutely the same, or two that are the most different (in shape, colour, texture).

Sort them into different colours or shapes, pick out your favourites, and simply enjoy how unique and different they all are. Think together about how each of you in your family have some things in common, but you are all equally unique. Think together about how the stones get their shape by the way that the sea knocks them against each other, over millions of years, sometimes making them smoother, and sometimes giving them sharp edges.

We are shaped and formed by our experiences too – just as you are helping your children grow in body, mind and spirit, your children are also helping you change and develop too.

Hold your favourite stones as you talk and think about these things together – they can be ‘thinking pebbles’ that you can turn over in your hands as you turn over the ideas in your mind. Keep your thinking pebbles, and when you get home, put them somewhere special – let them remind you of the time you spent together as a family, the way that you are each unique, and the way that you help shape each other through the amazing journey you are sharing.

**Seaside art**

**Artist Andy Goldsworthy** makes beautiful pictures and sculptures from natural objects such as sticks, leaves and stones. A day at the beach is a perfect opportunity to try this yourself as a family. Why not go on a treasure hunt, to collect stones of different shapes and colours, or with stripes or holes, and pieces of driftwood, and use them to make your own art? Even if you only make a smiley face with seaweed for hair, you have created something together – snap a photo of it to remember what you did!

**Sand Writing**

Sometimes children are upset if they build an amazing sandcastle one day, and then it’s gone when they come back – when the tide comes in, it washes everything away. You can always capture your creations in a photograph, but why not also make the most of the blank canvas that you are given each new low tide?

- One fun game to play is to use a stick or spade to try and write your child’s whole name in the ‘wet’ bit of the beach, between each roll of the sea, waves – can you write all the letters before the water comes and erases it?
- You could also write little prayers in the sand – and watch as the water washes them away. As the words disappear, know in your mind and heart that your prayers have reached God, and that God hears us.

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If you don't have the chance to go to the beach, you can still do this at home, if you have a sand pit, or even on a baking tray with some flour: write your name, and then gently rake over the words to make them disappear and give you a blank canvas again.

**Time is precious**

Time together as a family is a precious thing. One of the tricky things with about holidays and little children is managing that time well: some people like to rest and take it easy, and simply lie back and enjoy the sunshine, while others want to be up and about and active. One project that might help is making a sundial – and it's really easy to do, as long as you don't need it to be too accurate!

All you need is a longish stick (a piece of driftwood works just fine) and several stones (about the size of your fist). Stand your stick upright in the sand, and place the stones around it in a circle, like a clock face.

At midday, the stick won't have much of a shadow, as the sun is directly overhead, but during the morning and afternoon, the shadow will get longer, and gradually move around part of the way round your circle. You can use this to help measure the time – 'When the shadow gets to this stone we can have ice creams' or 'Mum is allowed to nap between these two stones'. Nobody will be quite sure how long it will be, but it's a fun way of keeping time together!

**Protection**

All parents want to keep their children safe, balancing the wonderful gift of warmth and fresh air with the need to protect fragile skin against harmful UV rays. The Bible talks of God as a protector, who 'is there at your side to shade you from the sun'. As you rub the sunscreen on your child's skin, you can say a little prayer to God, that he will protect you and your family. Your own carefulness and love in protecting...
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