

Your Best Summer Yet!

Summer Planning Workshop and Mini-Retreat

Introduction to the Workshop

Welcome to our 1st annual summer planning workshop! I am so excited to have you all here. I put this workshop together because I love summer. I love feeling free from the daily requirements of lesson planning and teaching and requiring kids to do assignments. I love long leisurely breakfasts and park days and mountain hikes. I love water fights that keep my kids busy and happy for hours while I read a book inside.

But there are parts of summer that are so hard for me. Too many long leisurely mornings turn into days where everyone is still watching Netflix in their jammies at lunch time - and no one's eaten breakfast yet. Don't get me wrong. Upon occasion, this is exactly the kind of day we need. But when it becomes too frequent, it just feels like time wasted and opportunities lost.

I want to come up with a plan for this summer that will help me have the kind of summer I dream of. I want to figure out how to fit in the things that will make our summer awesome while still maintaining plenty of space for just hanging out. I find if I spend a little time ahead of time thinking about how I'd like to spend my time, I end up living my life much more in accordance with my values. We have more adventures with friends and fewer Garfield

marathons. I do more reading and writing and playing and snuggling and less yelling and arguing and pointless surfing of the internet.

This year I want to spend some real intentional time thinking about how to structure our summer so that we maximize the opportunities for adventure and goofing off and minimize the restlessness and grouchiness that comes from living without intention.

That's why I've invited you all here today. I wanted to share this process with friends because I always find the greatest inspiration and motivation from the brilliant women I know.

I know that some of you are expert planners and some of you take a more laid back approach to things. The planning we're going to do today is not about daily schedules and checklists and calendars - unless that's what you need it to be. Rather I'm going to walk you through a planning process that should work for everyone because it's based on identifying your personal wishes and goals and then identifying the obstacles that are likely to keep you from achieving those goals. *Then* you'll make a plan to prevent those obstacles from getting in your way.

When you leave here today, you should have a solid vision for your summer, a good start on a plan for achieving that vision, and a new goal setting and planning tool that you can use to achieve big and small goals in all areas of your life. Not bad for a morning's work.

We're going to start by introducing ourselves in the large group. We'll break into smaller groups a little later. After introductions, I'll introduce the planning method we're going to use and we'll work through the first part of it in a large group. It's a four step process and we'll do the first three steps in the large group. Then we'll take a break for some food and chit-chat and then we'll break into small groups to complete the final step of the process.

Introducing Ourselves

Before we get into our small groups, let's take a minute to introduce ourselves to each other in the large group. As we go around the room, please share your name, how long you've been homeschooling, your greatest summer parenting/housekeeping challenge, and your most memorable summer memory - either with your kids or as a child yourself.

Introducing WOOP

Earlier this year I picked up a book with the intriguing title *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation*. It's a very long book about a very simple idea. In it, Gabriel Oettingen shares decades of research into how to use visualization to reach your goals. Sounds a little cheesy, right?

That's pretty much what Oettingen concluded. She found that, in fact, visualizing success makes a person less likely to actually achieve success. Why? Because your brain processes visualization in pretty much the same way it processes actual experience. That's why daydreaming about a beach vacation is so awesome - your brain kicks out many of the same rewards it does when you're actually on the beach. But, because it was so easy to imagine, your brain assumes it's easy to achieve and so only allocates a small amount of energy for actually making it happen.

Oettingen found that there is a way of using visualization to actually increase the likelihood you will pursue your dreams. It's called mental contrasting and it involves contrasting your dream with the reality of the obstacles you're likely to encounter in pursuit of that dream. Then you create a plan to overcome those obstacles and visualize putting that plan in place.

Oettingen calls it the WOOP plan. That stands for Wish Outcome Obstacle Plan. Through decades of research, she found that using this type of plan

increases the likelihood of people achieving a wide range of goals from finding a romantic partner to increasing fitness to better performance on tests. We're going to use it today to plan an awesome summer for you and your family.

Are you ready?

Ok, first get out the worksheet labeled "Summer Dreams." This is where we'll record our wishes for the summer. First let's talk about what a wish is. Number one, it must be something you believe is attainable. So we're not going to be daydreaming about spending the summer alone on a beach in Hawaii - unless you truly believe that you can make that happen! For the purposes of today, your wish is an awesome summer with your family.

We're going to start by daydreaming about what that means to each of us individually. So I want you take the next 5 minutes or so and let your mind go. Think about the summer days and weeks and months with your kids and imagine all the elements that will make them awesome - park days, picnics, pool days, vacations, sleeping in, movie nights - whatever it is that you believe will make the perfect summer for your family. Visualize it in detail and make notes on your daydream worksheet.

Great! We're going to move quickly to the outcomes step because it closely related to the wish step. Just turn over your Daydream page and on the back jot down the outcomes you imagine from having the kind of summer you just dreamed about. Maybe you you're hoping for family togetherness or ending the summer feeling relaxed or a great sense of accomplishment for having achieved a specific goal. Whatever it is, write down what you believe the outcome or outcomes of that perfect summer would be, and as you do, imagine yourself experiencing those outcomes.

Awesome. Now let's rest in this space for a minute. Turn to your neighbors and in groups of 2 or 3, take a few minutes to share your wishes and outcomes.

Very good. Now, if we stop right here, we'll all feel good, but we will actually decrease the likelihood that we will achieve this awesome summer we just daydreamed about. Why? Because life happens. And when it does, if we haven't thought ahead of time about how we'll deal with it, we're likely to just throw up our hands and turn on Netflix.

So now you're going to visualize the obstacles that are waiting to derail your perfect summer. Maybe you want to plan a weekly park day, but you find packing food for the day overwhelming. Maybe you want to spend more time at the pool, but you can never figure out how to fit it in. As you brainstorm and visualize these obstacles, dig deep to find the real obstacle standing in your way. You might find some of the obstacles are personal feelings or personality traits within yourself. Maybe an obstacle to a weekly pool day is that you actually do not enjoy going to the pool with your kids. Be honest about that and write it down. I'll show you how to handle it in the next part of the workshop. For now, just write it down.

Whatever the obstacles, big or small, internal or external, let's find them now so we can deal with them. Use the "obstacles" worksheet to write down all of the things you can think of that might prevent you from pursuing your dream summer.

How are you doing? I bet your brain is already busy trying to solve the problems you just wrote down. That's great! But we're going to take a break here. Stretch your legs, get some food, make some new friends, visit with old ones. When we come back together we'll be working in small groups to create a plan to overcome the obstacles to our dream summer

Creating the Plan

Welcome back! Is everyone ready to get back to work? Before I send you off into small groups to work on these problems, I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the kind of plans we're going to make.

It's called an if-then plan, and research shows that it's very effective in helping people form new habits. It's also very simple. I'll use an example to illustrate the concept.

Say that your wish is to participate in a weekly park day with friends. The outcomes you envision for this wish are time spent with friends, a relaxed feel to the summer, and fresh air and exercise for the kids. The biggest obstacle you have identified is feeding your children on this day. So now you need to make a plan for overcoming that obstacle.

Maybe you think packing a picnic lunch is the way to overcome this obstacle. So your if/then plan may go something like this: "If it is the night before park day, then I will pack a picnic for the next day." And you might add a second if/then to this. "If I do not have food to pack, I will make a quick run to the grocery store to get food for a picnic."

You may also decide that the way to handle this problem is to just take some snacks and eat lunch when you get home. Your if/then might read something like this. "If it is 12:00 and we are at the park, then we will go home for lunch before the kids fall apart."

The key to the If/Then plan is identifying the trigger for your action. You want to identify a time or an event that will prompt you to act to overcome the obstacle. The simple act of writing this plan engages your subconscious to work for you. Because you've taken the time to make the plan, when the triggering event happens, you'll be more likely to implement your plan.

Let's practice another one. Say your wish is to read more for yourself this summer. The outcome you envision is personal fulfillment, increasing your own education, and some time to yourself. The obstacle you've identified is never having the time. So now you have to figure out when and how you're going to find the time.

The easiest way to create a new habit is to pin it to an already established habit. So maybe you pin your reading time to lunch. "If we have just finished lunch, then I will spend 15 minutes reading." Or maybe you want to pin it to your morning, "If I have just woken up, then I will read for 15 minutes."

In general, you want to avoid pinning things to a specific time. Especially for those of us living in families, time can be fluid. You're more likely to be successful if you pin it to an event or a general time of day (morning, evening, etc.). There are exceptions, of course, but if you can, try to make your "If" event independent of clock time.

Okay, let's use one last example before I set you loose to create your own plans. What if the obstacle you've identified is something in yourself. A feeling you have about something - maybe it's a fear of something or a personal disliking for doing an activity. Let's use the example I used earlier of just not enjoying pool days with your kids.

There are two ways to go with this. You can create an if/then plan to adjust your attitude. Or, you can decide that it's just not an appropriate goal. One of the benefits of using WOOP is that it can help you discover goals that are not attainable, not truly something you desire, or not appropriate for this time in your life. This is awesome because you can stop wasting energy on them and you can make a conscious, reasoned decision to stop beating yourself up over not achieving them. This process helps you identify goals that are truly in line with your values and your personality and your current situation in life.

So you might just look at the situation and say, "You know what? This is not the year for weekly pool days. Maybe next year." And then you can stop feeling guilty about not doing it and put your energy into something else.

But let's say you've visualized the outcomes you expect from a weekly pool day - stronger swimmers, joyful family bonding, exercise for the kids, the opportunity to play with your kids without the distractions of the things that need to be done at home, tired children who sleep soundly that night - and you decide that these outcomes really are worth the hassle. What does your if/then plan look like?

It might be something as simple as "If I start to dread the hassle of the pool day, then I will remind myself of how good it is for my family and I will take my kids to the pool."

Why does this work? Because you're pre-programming your brain to respond in this way. You've already anticipated the negative thoughts that will come, and you've already decided how you will respond to them. It becomes more work for your brain to formulate a different response because you've already done the work.

In addition to your if/then worksheet, you will find in your folder some other summer planning pages that might help you. Sometimes an if/then plan looks like a daily or weekly schedule or routine - "if it is Tuesday afternoon, then we will go to the library" or "if we have just finished lunch, then we will have quiet time." I've put in some planning pages to help you create daily and weekly routines if that's something you need or want to do.

There's also pages for daily checklists for your kids and yourself and a page to create a list of summer rules that you can post for your family. These will help you create if/then plans for your family - "if you have finished your daily checklist, then you may have screen time." In our house we need rules about

screen time, water play, and when it's okay to knock on the neighbors' doors in the morning.

These are for you to use if you find them helpful in forming your plan for the summer. Some of them might be very helpful in implementing your if/then plan, and others might not appeal to you. I've also included the source of each sheet so that if you want, you can print more for yourself.

Okay, before we break into groups, does anyone have any questions?

Good. Now in our small groups I want you to share the WOO part of your process and then work together to help each other form if/then plans to overcome the obstacles you've identified.