

# Parents & School Together for Success



The Parent Information & Resource Center Newsletter for parents and families

Summer 2009

## Summer Learning = FUN!

Winter can be a blur of activities or early dinners and then to bed followed by doing it all again the next day. Summer is a break from that rigid routine. However, there is no getting around it: Over the summer months, children can lose up to 60% of the math and reading skills that they learned during the year or one to three months of learning. Experiences and information that promote learning can continue right through these hot and fun months. Here are some ways that parents can help their children make the transition from the end of school to summer learning fun!



**Keeping kids motivated!** Summer is perfect for blending fun, learning, and spending time with your child. Parent and caregiver attitudes toward reading, mathematics, and learning have a *tremendous influence* on children's attitudes toward learning. Actions speak louder than words, so take this summer time to communicate to your child the importance of these subjects through your daily activities—doing and learning, together. Practice is important and summer is a good time to practice skills. Ask your child's teacher for suggestions that will keep the "learning" continuing through the summer as well as maintaining skills acquired through the school year.

**Set aside time each day to read.** Reading aloud to children is not only a great fun activity, it's a sure way to start them on the path to a love of learning—and it's never too early to start! While reading aloud *to kids* helps increase their reading interest and ability, how about turning the tables and have them read aloud *to you*. It helps to increase their reading fluency. Make a game of it – "you read one page; I'll read one page."

Track the number of books or pages your child reads and reward him or her with a special activity or treat when he or she reaches certain milestones (for example, every 10<sup>th</sup> book or 50 pages). Read a book together as a family — have all the readers in the family take turns reading aloud. Introduce your child to many kinds of information in the daily newspaper. Ask your child to find the pages containing news about government leaders, editor's opinions, weather reports, car sales, house and apartment rentals and want ads. Discuss how to use this information.

Your town library is a wonderful place to promote the love of reading, and the librarian can suggest grade-level as well as pure recreational books that will keep your kids neurons clicking. Many libraries have wonderful summer reading programs that reward children for the number of books they read. Check it out!

**Encourage discovery and adventure** - Summer is a great time for helping to develop your child's imagination and explore new hobbies and ideas. Create some neighborhood clubs such as a drama club, music club, reading club, rock club, math club...whatever interests your child! You give that teaser idea and see where it goes!!! Create a summer scrapbook. Save postcards and movie tickets, record family stories or interesting events from each day, whether you're going on vacation or just going to your neighborhood park.



Keep a calendar of activities and events visible so children can track what they have done and what they have to look forward to yet. Realizing what they have done and what is yet to come can cut down on that age-old disease – boredom!

**Check out safe, parent-approved Internet sites.** There are many that offer a "summer camp" theme – a daily craft, some

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brain teasers, video streaming of current events, and tons of grade related math, reading and science work to be checked out in a fun way.

***Learn from a vacation.*** Think of your summer vacation as a great tool for learning. Get your kids reading, doing math or learning geography without them even realizing it. How about a new journal or notebook for that summer trip? Keeping a record of the fun will help your family to keep those memories! Let your child help to plan a trip. Figure out the travel time required, the cost, and the best time to make the trip. Let kids go online to sites such as MapQuest to help “research” the journey to and from your vacation destination as well as help to choose some family fun activities.

***Food Fun - A trip to the supermarket – plan ahead.*** Have your child chose a dish or meal. Have them check what supplies are on hand and make a shopping list. At the supermarket let your child to decide which items are the best buys. Your child can check prices against the sales receipt after you return home. An ordinary trip to the grocery store can be a learning journey.

Grocery stores are wonderful environments for learning about math. For the older child, work together to figure out package sizes, unit costs, and nutritional content. Calculations come into play when comparing prices. Was the cost of a gallon of milk higher or lower than last week? How much is the difference? (And by the way, just how many quarts are there in a gallon? Hmmm. Let’s look that one up when we get home.)

Involving your child in weighing items such as fruits and vegetables, and then estimating and calculating the cost per pound and total price not only teaches math skills, it helps to make them savvy consumers.



***Living within our means.*** Teach children who have allowances or regular spending money how to budget. Ask them to make a two-column list of expenses and income. Under expenses, they list what they expect to spend for movies, toys, baseball cards, treats, etc.

Then have your child add all the expenses and subtract the total from the income. Talk about ways to save for something special or open a savings account.

***Writing is fun and a great way to connect to family and friends!*** Improve listening skills and imagination. Read a story aloud to your child and stop before the end. Ask them how they might guess the story will turn out? Then finish the story and discuss the ending.

Did it turn out the way they thought it would? Have your child write letters or notes to relatives or friends that live in another state, town, or even next door! Give them a notebook or journal to write down their thoughts, ideas, or stories.

***What does it take to grow?*** – Teach cause-and-effect relationships. Use two similar, healthy plants. Ask your child to water one plant and ignore the other for a week or two, keeping both plants in the same place. At the end, ask your child to water the drooping plant. Then talk about what happened and why. Plants usually perk up with water just as children perk up with good words and smiles from parents.

## **Summer Healthy Fun – Stretch, Run, Bike**

Have you ever noticed children playing in the park? What do you picture - children *running* and laughing. When children leave the confines of the TV room their natural instinct is to romp and run and skip. Just getting your children outside will increase their level of activity. Turn off the TV and help to move your child from watching to doing. Help them to get fresh air and exercise.

Make sure your children include outdoor activities in their daily routine for better health, a great social life and lots of fun. By encouraging outdoor fun and activities you are encouraging an adult life of fitness and health. How about some backyard fun through family soccer games, softball, playing catch or simply a game of freeze or tag? Gardening is a rewarding and learning based form of outdoor fun. Children do learn from example and participation. Enjoy family bike rides and hikes.



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Afternoons at the park can be a way to break from TV routines. Introduce hobbies that include fresh air and activities such as bug collecting, bird watching, biking, or simply skipping, running or hiking. Ask your child to do at least one kind of exercise every day.

Walk, when possible, instead of riding. Help your children participate in group physical activities as well by enrolling in local summer activity programs in your community. It is also good to help your child have a disciplined exercise routine, especially for older children. How about a family exercise contest? Challenge each other with exercise plans. Together, plan for a reward to a prescribed plan of exercise. Rainy day - get those old exercise tapes out and exercise right along with your child. No matter the activity encourage your children to enjoy the outdoors, the sunshine and the adventures of just playing outside.

**Remember to keep it fun!** You don't want to sour your kids on learning during the summer break. Summer is full of both "I'm bored" or realizing that adventures can abound.

Help your children view a world to be discovered from the back yard to the computer screen to books to friends to family fun days to family vacations. The summer is great time to explore and learn at a different pace and environment. <http://www.nwrel.org/comm/monthly/summer.html>

## Adolescent Brain Development

Brain growth and development picks up again in early adolescence. A process called "pruning" occurs - connections that are not used wither away and those that are used stay - the "use it or lose it" law. Unlike infants whose brain activity is determined by parents and environment, teens are more able to influence their own brain activity. Nevertheless, adult input with a wide range of appropriate options is still necessary.

Kids who exercise their brains by learning to organize their thoughts, understand abstract concepts, and control their impulses are laying the neural foundations that will serve them for the rest of their lives. Dr. Jay Giedd of the National Institute of Mental Health says... "If a teen is doing music, sports or academics, those are the connections that will be hardwired. If they are lying on the couch or playing video games or MTV, those are the skills and connections that are going to survive."

Also at this time an adolescent's frontal brain lobes which are associated with critical thinking skills and reasoning are rapidly developing. Middle school is the right time to begin presenting material in ways that encourage using advanced reasoning skills and critical thinking. The growth in adolescent thinking can be divided into several areas:

**Advanced reasoning skills** - include the ability to think about multiple options and possibilities. Advanced reasoning includes a more logical thought process and the ability to think about things hypothetically.

**Abstract thinking skills** - thinking about things that cannot be seen, heard, or touched, an ability to solve problems, learn and understand new material.

**Metacognition** - the ability to think about thinking. Metacognition allows individuals to think about how they feel and what they are thinking. It involves being able to think about how one is perceived by others.

Adolescents need motivation to learn. **Intrinsic** motivation comes from within. It promotes learning for the enjoyment and personal satisfaction learning new information provides. Intrinsic motivation can be supported by families modeling the rewards that come from building a new project, reading a good and even cooking dinner for those you love. Students are more apt to strive to learn for learning's sake as well as for good grades and future scholarships if they have a model of being motivated from within.

**Extrinsic** motivation comes from a source outside the student - teachers give grades and classroom privileges while parents may reward grades with money and/or additional privileges. Extrinsic motivation can be very influential for a short time; if it is the only source of motivation, student benefits are neither as inclusive nor helpful as those found when motivation is from within and for a purpose.

## Adolescence - A Good Time to Stay in Touch.

Families are in position to share and discuss views and opinions with teens. Investigate what a teen thinks about news story and share political and spiritual beliefs. Teens are already thinking about these things and they will learn if they have a non-threatening atmosphere in which to discuss their opinions and feelings.



# SAVE THE DATE!

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