

Summer Amnesia: Avoid the Brain Drain

Kids lose academic ground in the summer. Use these tips to keep them from falling behind.
by Craig Bystrynski



Every child knows the feeling, and what adult can forget it? When the textbooks are turned in and the classroom doors closed for the summer, there's a sweet sense of freedom.

But those weeks of fun can have real consequences for learning. Call it the summer slide or summer amnesia: Children lose as much as two months of reading and math skills during that time, according to the National Summer Learning Association at Johns Hopkins University.

For teachers, that means a lot of lost class time as they work to rouse student brains from a long summer's nap. In a typical classroom, the first four to six weeks are spent reviewing material students have forgotten. And for kids who fall behind, the summer slide has long-term consequences for success in school.

Show Them How

Avoiding a pronounced summer slide isn't hard, but it does require focus. The key is to keep your child's brain switched on without making him feel like he's still in school.

Step one is to display your own love of knowledge. Whether we adults realize it or not, kids both younger and older model their parents' behavior. So make sure your kids see you learning. Talk about current events with them. Share stories from a book you're reading. If you have a hobby, let them join in. Challenge your children to think and examine, just as you do.

Do It Daily

Given the opportunity, kids love to learn. It's school that they think is a drag. So find ways to teach them, without their knowing it, in your everyday life. Ask your child to add up how much you'll save with coupons during a trip to the grocery store. Have him measure ingredients for a recipe. Or ask him to read the newspaper to you while you cook or

clean. Track the temperature every day. Look up weather reports for distant cities where you have relatives. Find different types of trees when you go to the park. Be creative, and keep an eye out for the chance to stimulate young minds.

Visit the Library

Your local library is sure to have a summer reading program. The librarian can offer many other book suggestions that match your child's reading ability and interests. It's important that children continue to read during the summer even if they prefer newspapers or magazines over books. And reading aloud to your child is beneficial right into the teen years.

Seek Out Learning

Summer has a lot more to offer than extended hours playing computer games or watching TV. Take a trip to a museum, historical site, aquarium, zoo, or public garden. Lots of camps offer education-related opportunities that go beyond standard classroom learning. Some colleges, school districts, and nonprofit organizations do the same. Ask for suggestions at your child's school or the district office.

With a little effort, you can make your child's summer stimulating as well as fun. You'll keep him on the learning curve and ready to move ahead once school starts again.

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