

Ask A School Psychologist: Combat Summer Learning Loss

Dr. R. Coranne Johnson

Hello Summer... Good bye school! Summer is here and we sometimes think that these lazy, hazy months should be all play and no work. However, teachers, parents and researchers know that children lose academic skills over the summer. Commonly referred to as the "summer slide," this decline in academic skills over summer break is a common occurrence and can be combated through strategically incorporating some engaging activities that focus on the three 'R's,' reading, writing and arithmetic in July and August. Giving your children that much-needed break from structured academic learning is important, so creating opportunities for them to use their academic skills in fun summer activities is essential.

So what can a parent do?

Reading

- All kids and teens should be reading 20 to 30 minutes a day over the summer. For those who are not reading yet or find reading challenging, daily reading can be reading with a parent or sibling. It is essential that kids and teens have their eyes on a book daily. I suggest letting them have a bonus reading time of 30 minutes before lights out if they are in bed on time.
- Keep plenty of reading materials around the house. Magazines like Highlights, Sports Illustrated for Kids and National Geographic Kids have interesting short articles that are engaging for a variety of readers. Comics are another form of reading material that has sometimes been undervalued. I have worked with teens who enthusiastically read Autotraders... reading in all forms is valuable – model and encourage reading.
- Love your local library. It is the place to promote the love of reading. Librarians are an excellent resource and can suggest Grade-level as well as the latest books that have hooked kids' interest. The Calgary Public Library offers free programming for kids and teens over the summer – check it out at calgarypubliclibrary.com.

Writing

- Keeping a journal is another way to record summer experiences and thoughts. Give your children new journals and fancy pens. Talk about what they can write about or draw in their journal: stories, poems, songs and personal experiences.
- Encourage your children to stay in touch with friends and relatives over the summer through postcards and emails.

Arithmetic

- Who would have thought that shopping could be a practical way to use estimation, addition, multiplication and division skills? Ask your teen to keep track of the grocery tally – provide them an

incentive if their estimate is close. Kids can work out what is cheaper, buying one yogurt or six. Provide your teen with a back-to-school budget and ask them to make a purchase list based on local flyers.

- Family game nights are fun and memorable! Board games such as Monopoly, Trouble, Battleship as well as Snakes and Ladders require players to use their math skills. Don't forget about card games such as Crazy 8s and cribbage, which utilize addition skills.

Don't stop at the three 'R's,' go on family field trips to local museums, and build your children's experiences and knowledge. Remember that concerts, arts and crafts, and gardening inspire your kids' and teens' creative side – take it all in and enjoy the summer learning.

Dr. R. Coranne Johnson, R. Psych., has been working in the education field for 24 years as a teacher, administrator and school psychologist. She has also taught university courses in the areas of special education, psychology and program effectiveness. Through Dr. Johnson's work in schools, she has developed a wealth of knowledge about learning, literacy and special education. Dr. Johnson can be contacted through her website, helpingchildren.ca.