Help Kids Learn this Summer

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It’s summer time. Classes are over, swimming pools are open, little league is in full swing and without planning your child’s learning will be on vacation too! But summer can provide an opportunity for learning, if parents are purposeful in planning.

Is the summer learning loss legitimate? Do kids really experience the summer slide? Dr. Karl Alexander, retired John Hopkins professor, has documented in his longitudinal work with youth that “two-thirds of the academic achievement gap between disadvantaged youngsters and their more advantaged peers can be explained by what happens over the summer”. Alexander emphasizes the importance of summer learning or the lack of it--to academic achievement. He emphasizes that all young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer. Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer.

Researchers like Harris Cooper have documented the learning loss that occurs during summer breaks. His research tells us that summer learning loss is cumulative and math skills, specifically computation and spelling suffer the most. His research has found that most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains.
So, the final school bell for this school year has likely rung for your children. What will the summer be like? Will it be a summer full of music lessons, library visits, museums, community festivals, summer camps, gardening, and nature exploring? Or will it be television, video games, and “hanging out”?

You’ve heard the old saying, “A parent is a child’s first and most important teacher”. Families are extremely important in their role in encouraging and motivating their children during the summer months. There are many great activities for parents and children to select. Many communities, schools, and youth organizations have opportunities worth exploring. Parents play an important role in accessing these activities.

It is summer, and yes—enjoy your break from school, but remember to not take a break from learning. How can you make your kid’s summer a time for learning? How can you reduce the summer learning lag? Join us this month as we blog about summer learning and strategies to encourage knowledge growth during summer school vacation. We will explore ways for parents to help their children discover the joys of reading and tips to keep those math skills sharp. We will discuss challenges that parents face when trying to encourage learning. We may even share ideas on celebrating National Summer Learning Day on June 19th! As always, we look forward to hearing about your experiences around increasing learning during the summer. Share with us how you have learned to make summer a growth time for your child on our blog, the Science of Parenting!

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