

THE PARENT LETTER



About Our Kids:
A Letter for Parents by the
NYU Child Study Center

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SUMMER VACATION: KEEPING OUR CHILDREN ENGAGED AS LEARNERS

Families with school age children often plan their family schedules around the dates and rhythms of the school calendar. They read school memos carefully so they can mark off meetings, assignment due dates, vacation recesses and half days. They schedule babysitters, play-dates, chores, and family vacations to match the times when their children are not expected to be at school. Here we are facing the warmer, longer, slower days of July and August known as summer vacation and many families are also thinking about more than just providing childcare. Many parents are also wondering how they can keep their child productively engaged as a learner.

Why is it important to keep my child socially and academically engaged over the summer?

Staying in training as a learner over the longer summer break between school years is critical so that students hold on to prior learning and return to school in September with the behaviors and attitudes for new learning to take hold. Educators have an expectation that while the summer months are a time for a healthy change of schedules and routines, and more time for yourself, it is also a time to stay engaged as a learner through talking, listening, reading and writing. The student who idly passes two months of time in the summer may have difficulty getting back into the swing of school life socially and academically. Some social and academic gains made in the previous school year do get lost when behaviors, strategies, and understandings are not applied and practiced during the long break of summer.

What can I do to keep my child socially and academically engaged during the summer?

- ❑ Find out if your child's school has a policy for summer assignments and if they do, use it as a way to provide direction and structure to some of your child's time in July and August. At many schools, teachers get together and plan pleasant summer assignments that encourage students to get ready for the next grade. These assignments are then used in September to purposefully begin the work of the new school year from the first day of school. Summer work might include choosing and reading a certain number of books from a reading list, keeping a journal, and more. Help your child set a schedule so that the assignment isn't completed in a frantic rush in the last days of summer, which would lessen the intent of summer assignments.
- ❑ Keep in touch with school friends by exchanging contact information. Parents of young children need to take the lead on this and older students should be encouraged to find out how they can stay in touch by phoning, emailing, writing and visiting with their friends.
- ❑ Check with your child's teachers and local bookstores about summer reading programs. These sometimes include rewards, such as free books, in exchange for completing a log documenting that your child has read a certain number of books. This is a wonderful way for children to read books by their favorite authors or try out something new as a reader.
- ❑ Many community resources offer educational and recreational programs and courses for free or for a nominal fee. You can find a program that matches an interest your child wants to participate in or develop, as well as create an opportunity to explore new interests. New York City Parks, The Zoological Society, and museums often send flyers out to schools to distribute to families. Check with the Parent Coordinator at your child's school for flyers or contact information about these kinds of programs. Some of the offerings might be available to the whole family.
- ❑ Day-camp and sleep-away camp experiences provide the opportunity to build independence, new friendships, and pursue interests. If your child is going to sleep-away camp, make sure they pack along favorite kinds of reading and writing materials with needed addresses.
- ❑ Ask your child to make an oral (or written if they are willing) current events report for the dinner table discussion. Pick an article from the newspaper or TV/radio/internet news and be ready to share the facts and your opinion. Older learners might want to cover a particular issue over a few days. Younger children could be ready to share news about their summer school or day-camp.

- ❑ Ask your child to prepare one of the many lists, notes, or cards that organized families depend on. What about lists for ingredients for a special family recipe or a trip to the supermarket, or reminders to go to the laundry or to send a birthday card to grandma?
- ❑ Television and movies are good entertainment when monitored. Engage your child in discussions about the television shows and movies they watch with you, their friends, or on their own.
- ❑ Trips to the supermarket and other family chores don't stop during the summer and your child can become more involved or responsible for these chores. Depending on your child's age they can help find items on your list, help prepare the list of things to buy or do, do the mental math of estimating how much you have left to spend as you go along, and figure out how much change to expect.
- ❑ Involve your child in planning a family outing or extended vacation. If you're going to the movies let them figure out or assist in calculating how much the tickets/snacks will cost, check the listing or call to find out when the movie begins, make a plan for getting there on time by figuring out what time to leave and more. Family vacations could call for help in figuring out where to go, where to stay, how to get there, and getting information. Day trips or extended vacations are also wonderful opportunities to start or add to collections, create organized displays, and research a collection topic by getting information from books, the internet and experts.
- ❑ Vacations away from home, however short or long, could be documented by gathering mementoes, brochures, taking photos, and writing postcards. Writing captions for a photo album, creating a video slide show or family scrapbook is a worthwhile responsibility.
- ❑ Make sure that reading materials are available in your home through the summer. In addition to books, provide interesting and appropriate magazines, newspapers and monitored Internet access.

What if my child must attend summer school or will be repeating a grade based on their academic record?

Students who do not meet a particular level of performance expectation for promotion may have to attend a summer school program or repeat their current grade, or perhaps do both. Of course, any questions or concerns you have about the school's decision should be addressed at the school by your child's principal and teachers. If your child must do either, then be supportive and positive by helping your child see it as an opportunity to become a stronger learner. Avoid blaming or shaming your child, and encourage them (and the family) to grow from this experience instead. If your child is struggling with his/her feelings or behavior about being required to attend summer school or repeat a grade, consult with the school psychologist or social worker at your child's school to get some strategies for addressing this concern. Make sure to plan for time to meet summer school responsibilities and after school recreation much as you would during the regular school year.

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ABOUT THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the research, prevention and treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers evaluation and treatment for children and teenagers with anxiety, depression, learning or attention difficulties, neuropsychiatric problems, and trauma and stress related symptoms.

We offer a limited number of clinical studies at no cost for specific disorders and age groups. To see if your child would be appropriate for one of these studies, please call (212)263-8916.

The NYU Child Study Center also offers workshops and lectures for parents, educators and mental health professionals on a variety of mental health and parenting topics. To learn more or to request a speaker, please call (212) 263-8552.

For further information, guidelines and practical suggestions on child mental health and parenting issues, please visit the NYU Child Study Center's website, www.AboutOurKids.org.



Changing the Face of Child Mental Health NYU Child Study Center

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