

Back to School, Already?!

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How many of you panicked when you went into Target and saw the “back to school” section already set up? Already!? Where did the summer go? If you are a teacher, then that reminder of school being back in session can sometimes be a much more haunting notion than even for a parent! After all, school JUST got out for summer break.

Going back to school means so much more than getting back to waking up early and doing homework. It involves a whole host of physical, mental, and social/emotional changes. Transitions can be challenging for adults, and even more so for young children who may not possess all the necessary coping skills to handle changes and transitions. Getting kids ready for going back to school requires preparation and time...not just getting them the right school supplies. It requires re-training their brain to get back into a routine that is conducive to the academic environment they have been on break from for two months.

The mind, after all, is just another muscle. When a brain is active and stimulated (during the traditional 10-month school year) it is trained to remember skills, facts, and processes at remarkable speed. Then, once a student hits summer vacations, their brain and the stimuli keeping it active generally comes to a complete stop. (Enter oversleeping, video games, tv, lack of schedule, unhealthier food, etc.). Because of these factors, the brain loses its elasticity and ability to make critical connections and retention efforts become futile. After a two-month brain vacation, you simply cannot pick up where you left off. You must get your brain back in shape! Research shows that it can potentially take up to two months from the first day of school to get a child’s brain development back on track.

With what seems like just minutes until schools open their doors for another school year, what can we do right now to get students, and their brains, ready for the new academic season? First, a proper amount of rest is important. Making sure children rest enough (and not too much, either) is one of the most important factors. Start slowly and incrementally adjust their bedtime and wake up schedule over the next few weeks to ensure they are not shocked into a new sleep cycle when school begins. Second, physical activity is key for healthy brain function. The brain needs circulation and oxygen to stay in shape. If your child is less active during the summer months, get them out and moving. More outdoor games and less video games will help stimulate the brain. Other academic skills might be rusty as well. Get your child back into reading. Any book will do, so that they start making text connections and comprehension skills increase. Lastly, another great way to start getting your child ready for school is to get back on track with healthier eating and consistent meals. All too often, meals and snacks start to lose structure during summer. This creates some confusion in the body when students go back to school. Kids starting school without any nutritional transition often are hungry at wrong times or are not willing to eat their lunch at the appropriate times. This causes students mental focus to be off, thus affecting their success in the classroom.

Summer isn’t over, despite what Target might tell us. Soak of these last few weeks of freedom! However, there are a few small things we can do to help our students (and teachers) get ready for the new school year, so that on the first day of school, they are mentally and physically ready to meet the demands of another successful school year.