

Summer Learning Loss

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Well parents, congratulations...you crossed the finish line and made it through another school year with your children! You are so proud of their growth over the past year. They can now solve multi-step math problems in seconds, or write a cohesive multiple paragraph persuasive argument. But, by the end of summer, you'll begin to notice that they can't solve 2x2 without counting on their fingers, or even come up with a logical argument to why it is important to wear sunscreen. You panic! This is not uncommon, and there is a phenomenon known by many names that has to do with a loss of knowledge that occurs over the summer months. Many phrases have been coined: Summer Slide, Summer Memory Loss, Summer Gap, Summer Brain Drain, or Summer Learning Loss. Regardless of the name it is a real problem, especially for teachers in September.

Oxford Learning has done research associated with this phenomenon. Some staggering statistics include that 2.6 months of math skills and 2 months of reading skills are lost over the summer break. It can take up to two months from the first day of school to get a child's brain development back on track. Additionally, by the end of grade six, students who have experienced summer learning loss over the years are on average two years behind their peers. This learning loss can be evident as early as grade one. As a result of this, six weeks in the fall are often dedicated to re-learning old material to make up for this loss. This is scary stuff...for teachers, parents, AND students.

The mind, after all, is just another muscle. Summer can be a time to relax the muscle, but we need to make sure it is not inactive to the point where it atrophies. We need it to continue to grow, or at least, not lose its strength. It is also important to note that summer learning loss is not really a result of forgetting or not practicing the skills that were recently learned in the prior grade. Rather, it is the result of brain inactivity. When a brain is active and stimulated (for the past 10 months) 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 come to a complete stop. (enter oversleeping, video games, tv, 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 have to get your brain back in shape!

Luckily, there are solutions. Oxford Learning research also indicated that a mere 2-3 hours per week during summer vacation is all that is needed to prevent any learning loss. Here are some great ideas to help fight summer learning loss and keep that developing brain sharp and ready to pick up full speed in the fall.

1. Reading 4-5 books over the summer can entertain and exercise the brain. Imagine all the far-off distant lands children can visit with the turn of a page! Take the books to the beach, visit the library, read at the park or in the car on a road trip. There is a ton of down time...never travel without a couple of books.
2. Stay active. Physical activity also promotes great brain activity. Go swimming, hike, visit the park, join a summer sports league, or just get out and walk along the beach.

3. Pick up a new hobby. Now is the time to immerse yourself in a new project. Get creative with arts and crafts, start baking, create new recipes, build a model car or airplane, or check out some stem kits available at local toy and educational stores.
4. Use your tech. Download fun and educational apps that require grade level appropriate skills. Compete against yourself or others to get the highest score.
5. Check out your local school offerings. Most schools offer a variety of summer camps and summer schools that creatively and academically enrich your child's summer experience.
6. There are always some tried and true classics. Summer bridging activity books are always a solid way to stay on top of the most recent academic acquisitions your child has made in the prior school year. Bridging books are always available on amazon and local bookstore. Put one or two in your suitcase and pull it out while waiting for room service to arrive while on your trip!

As you can see, the brain is like any other muscle. If not exercised, it will lose its effectiveness. Don't let your child's brain become a "dad bod" by the end of summer! Keep it sharp, keep it tone, fight that summer learning loss at all costs.