



June 2011, Volume 8

Boost Your Child's Learning Over the Summer with These Ideas



Summer vacation means freedom from homework and tests for most children. It can also mean a slide in academic skills and knowledge during the time away from school. Parents can help their children keep academic skills sharp, however. Trying a few of these simple ideas can still allow for a fun and relaxed school break.

Things to Remember

You can help your child hold on to what he or she learned in school without knowing everything your child studied in school. Follow these ideas to help your child maintain academic skills. Try to:

- Keep your child and youth's activities hands-on and interesting. The activities don't need to belong to specific classroom subjects. They should keep your child engaged and active.
- Find times to connect what your child has learned in school

to everyday activities. Use these activities as a place to start discussions and to ask questions. Ask questions that need more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Think about doing this at a meal or bed time.

- Reduce the amount of time your child spends playing video games, watching television alone, using the computer, or even using a cell phone. Encourage some screen time on educational sites or activities.

- Make sure your child is staying physically active and eating nutritious food.

Consider trying some or all of the following tips to keep academic skills sharp:

- **Read!** - The library has many resources. Magazines, comic

books, story hour, book clubs for different ages or kinds of books, music, and DVDs are all typically found at your local library. These resources all encourage reading. Librarians can also help you to find books that fit your child's age and interest levels. Look for other ways to include daily reading, such as reading an article in a newspaper or from an online news source. Have your child read recipes, directions, or the rules to a board game. The idea is to look for, use and maintain reading skills regularly.

- **Count!** - Math skills can be practiced in many ways. Ask your child to help bake cookies, estimate the mileage to a favorite destination, work a jigsaw puzzle or play a board game. All of these activities can require your child to do math. Look for everyday activities where math is used.

Tools You Can Use!

The Internet offers many free sites that can support your child's learning. The Minnesota Parent Center, MN PIRC, has put together a page of links to sites that parents can depend upon to be safe and educational. These sites offer free and engaging learning activities. You'll find a variety of subject areas for different age levels. Visit <http://www.pacer.org/mpc/helpchildrenlearn.asp> to find these resources—and more!

Parents can also find free worksheets, games and learning activities on the Pearson website. This company produces the MCA-II exams, which are the standardized tests that help districts measure student progress toward Minnesota's academic standards. Go to http://perspective.pearsonaccess.com/perspective/appmanager/mn/family?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=par_lr_overview_page to see what is offered!

- **Do!** - Summer programs, classes or camps can be a rich source of learning for your child. They offer children the chance to explore and develop interests and skills they don't have time to work on during the school year. Look for these types of programs in parks and recreation departments, public school districts, and places like museums and zoos. Some programs may be difficult to take part in because of cost, location, or both. Ask if help is available.
- **Talk!** - Ask your child's classroom teacher and other school staff for ideas. They can point to resources and activities that can build academic skills. Many schools offer classes for students needing more help to be ready for the next school year. Districts decide who should attend these classes. Speak to your child's teacher or school principal to learn more about your school's programming.
- **Surf!** - The Internet has many safe, engaging sites. They can offer your child information on interesting topics and activities. It's a great source for word and math games, art and crafts projects, interesting photography or video and current world events. Visit the sites along with your child or teen when possible. If you don't have a computer or Internet service, you can use a library computer to visit the websites. Talk about what you find. See the box for a great online resource for Minnesota families.
- **Move!** - Physical activity helps both body and brain health. Find an activity you can share with your child, such as walking or swimming. School breaks are also a great time for your child to try a new sport.

Please call the Minnesota Parent Center at (952) 838-9000 / (800) 537-2237 toll free if you have questions about this article.

Frequently Asked Questions

Parent's Question: I work days and can't be home with my son during the summer. He just wants to play with friends or play sports. Is this going to hurt him academically?



You can find ways to keep his academic skills sharp by using his love of sports and play. Find books, articles and websites on the athletes and teams he admires, or on the history of a sport he loves. Encourage him to write a fan letter or two. Have him go outside to play a sport informally with friends. Ask him to create a game of his own and to teach friends how to play it. Talk about and track statistics for players and teams, and ask him to make predictions about wins and losses. If it's possible, sign him up to play a sport of his choice (and have him track his own stats!) Enroll him in a program that focuses on a particular sport or simply encourages him to be physically active. Keep him drinking plenty of water and eating healthy food during all this activity. He may not realize it, but by trying some of these suggestions, he'll stay in shape academically, too!

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The MN PIRC is a statewide project that helps families and schools build stronger ties to benefit students. It provides free training, individual assistance, and information to families and schools. Minnesota Parent Center is a project of PACER Center, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization. PACER supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities.