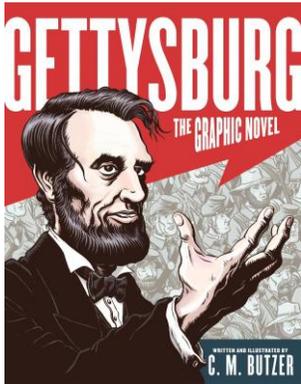


12 Ways for Kids to Avoid the Summer Slide

Many educators refer to the “summer slide” as the trend for children to lose many of the skills, knowledge, and motivation developed in the previous school year. It is natural for someone – anyone – to dull their abilities if they are not regularly practiced. Allowing summer days to pass by without intention or purpose is an easy way to get through summer, but it is certainly not the best way if the ultimate goal is to foster personal and academic growth in a child.

Offered herein are several strategies for keeping your kiddos sharp in preparation for next school year. Try just one or even a combination of them all, and you will see positive results. With your kids’ minds active all summer long, they will have a happier summer, and you won’t worry about the transition back to school come Fall.



1. Get Creative with Summer Reading

Yes, your child’s school and the local library will have summer reading programs, which can be excellent options. Another option is to build your own reading program. Set a minimum reading time each day of thirty to sixty minutes, or break reading time into two thirty-minute chunks—one for a parent-suggested book and the other for whatever your child chooses to read. Remember that many of today’s graphic novels are more than simple comic books. You can find lists of acclaimed graphic novels, including Pulitzer Prize winners, at the American Library Association’s website.

2. Teacher Supply Stores are Treasure-troves of Affordable Goodies

Visit your local teacher supply store and stock up on workbooks and educational games. Other things you will find that might motivate summer loungers include timers for breaking the day up into learning chunks, craft supplies for every age, and educational games, videos and music.



3. Make a Vow for Vivid, Vicissitudinous Verbosity

Having each family member practice a “word-of-the-day” can be a fun way for everyone to expand their vocabulary. Put the word in large letters at the top of a page with the definition just below. Hang the word on the fridge and make a game out of using it in sentences all day long.

4. Build Budding Entrepreneurs

“Playing Store” is a classic children’s activity, but organizations like National Lemonade Day (www.lemonadeday.org) can serve as an excellent model for teaching children the many facets of operating a business. Selling lemonade, old toys, or artwork are all options using this model. Another option is to pull a portion of the food in your cabinets and pantry out onto the countertops. Let kids use real money, price items, break out calculators, and do the math. Make playing store a weekly occurrence, if your kids enjoy it. Make the game as simple or complex as suits your children’s ages.



5. Get Back to Nature

Many families plan fun and exciting trips to visit remarkable natural wonders every summer. Remember, there are wonderful local day-trip opportunities, many of which can be found on *The Houston Chronicle* website. Make a list at the beginning of the summer of the places you and your children would like to visit, and then place them on a family calendar for all to see. Anticipation will help the kids get excited about an upcoming “family fieldtrip.”



6. Turn the Kitchen into a Culinary Experiment Zone

There are day-to-day practical benefits to naming kids into chefs-for-the-day. They develop their understanding about nutrition, money, and time management. Jobs of finding the recipes, making the grocery list, cutting the coupons, doing the shopping, comparing brands, and cooking them meal each teach valuable lessons. However, you can take this activity a step further by discussing the chemistry of foods, the biology of the human taste system, and the economics of farm-to-table agriculture. Make sure that all adults involved agree to be good sports and enjoy whatever the children serve.

7. Tackle a Summer-Long Creative Project

An ideal summer-long project is one that requires planning, creative resourcefulness, and involving others. Children respond best when their project has tangible results, such as building a puppet show stage, planning a script, and hosting a puppet show for friends and family. Other classic examples include building a fort and creating a big science project like the baking soda volcano.

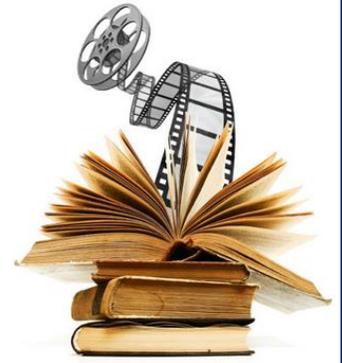


8. Take a Trip Around the World from Your Computer

Start a list of friends and family you know all over the globe. Then once a week, take an hour to really explore that destination via Google Earth and by researching online information. Expand your geographic horizons further by video-calling your friends or family and informally interviewing them about the area where they live. Post a map on the wall and stick a tack in each location you visit virtually.

9. “Read” Books Using a Variety of Media

It is beneficial to healthy brain development for children to read out loud at early ages. In addition to children taking turns reading aloud, audio books from your local library or YouTube videos with narration can deepen the experience of reading for children. Once you finish the book as a family, watch the movie together. Compare and contrast the books and the films.



10. Leverage Free Online Content for Educational Material



- www.brainpop.com has over 1,000 short animated movies for kids ages six to seventeen, making it the perfect substitute teacher for your kids over the summer.
- www.khanacademy.org is an excellent resource for high schoolers wanting some college prep experience.
- www.luminosity.com has memory development games that can strengthen the basic brain abilities.

The best reason to introduce your child to these websites is that it allows them to pursue topics of interest to them. Having a child’s buy-in increases the likelihood that they will maintain these habits throughout the summer.

11. Commit to a Cause

Stewardship and altruism are difficult values to instill, but your children can begin to practice these beliefs through a wide variety of volunteer options. If your child loves animals, see if you can spend some time volunteering at a local animal shelter. If your child is a fashionista, take a trip to a clothing drop center to help sort donated items. You can put together ready-to-wear outfits that coordinate well together. Many religious centers also provide summer volunteer opportunities, from building wells in impoverished countries to simply helping watch over the younger children on the playground.



12. Keep a “How I Spent My Summer Scrapbook.”

Choose a blank-page, over-sized book with ample pages for writing, collaging, collecting, and embellishing. Let kids decide whether or not to keep it private or share the results with the family.

