

Staying sharp over the summer: supporting your child's learning

We all remember the joy of summer holidays: lazy days blowing bubbles in the grass, filling up the kiddie pool in the backyard with the garden hose, the smell of sunscreen mingling with the melody of the ice cream truck announcing its arrival. There is no denying that those warm summer months when school takes a break are a favorite amongst students of all ages, and a time when some of their most meaningful memories are created.

One of the downsides of spending two months out of school though, is a lag in getting back into the rhythm of classes, homework and testing when September comes. It is a commonly known fact among teachers that it can take up to two full months for students to readjust to school and get back to a regular learning speed in the fall. That means four months of the year kids are not learning at the pace they could be. This does not mean that taking a break from school is not valuable – it is important for students to have time to recharge in those summer months. But to maximize your child or teen's learning all year round, there are some strategies you can implement to strike a balance between learning and leisure over the summer or to even combine them!

1. **Encourage daily reading.** Make sure your child is reading every day – whether it is novels, stories at bedtime or their favorite blog – keeping those reading muscles active over the summer is a great way to make sure they will be strong come the fall. Make summertime reading fun: all year long students read what they are assigned; summer is a great time for them to read for pleasure and discover what kinds of stories or topics they find interesting and develop a passion for.
2. **Seek out moments for learning.** Learning happens in all aspects of life, and lots of summertime activities have “teachable moments” built into them already. Anything from making homemade ice cream to collecting insects to identifying plants and flowers can be mined for educational purposes. There are also many summer activity options for older kids. Maybe your teenager loved that photography class they took during the school year and would like to experiment with a camera and some photo editing software. Even something like planting and tending to a vegetable garden can teach your kids valuable skills. Look around you and you will see that there are countless opportunities to integrate learning into an exciting and restful holiday.
3. **Reflect, review, reinforce.** It is easy to help your children maintain their writing skills over the break by supplementing their activities with regular writing exercises. Have them keep a journal chronicling the highlights of each week, and their adventures and conversations with friends. When they go to the cinema seeking air conditioning and entertainment, ask them to write a short review of the movie they saw. If there is a trip planned – whether it is somewhere far or near – ask your child to do some research on the location and write a report following your excursion.

Summer learning does not need to look like school learning – it is not necessarily about memorizing formulas or historical dates, but remaining mentally engaged and active. It can take place indoors and outdoors, and can be social or solitary. The goal is not to retain all the information learned over the school year, but to maintain the knowledge of *how* to learn that will make the transition back to school days go smoothly, while making sure the summer is the best study break it can be.

Taking the initiative: investing in your career development

When we enter the work world, we often have dreams and ambitions of growth and advancement in our chosen field. These may be goals that you go in with initially – dreams that take form during education – or those that come more slowly as you get acquainted with a company and see what paths and positions are available. Whatever way your aspirations took shape, most of us have had them at some point, but it can be easy to lose sight of them once you have achieved a stable position; it can be difficult to pursue better job opportunities when you are so busy with the job you have. The daily tasks that make up the contemporary working world are many, and when you are also striving to balance work with a healthy home life, thinking about how to move forward can seem like the invisible summit of a very high mountain.

Another reason you may lose sight of these early dreams is that you are quite comfortable in the job you have: you know how to do it and you do it well, and the unknown territory of what might be out there is too vast and overwhelming. However, in order to stay mentally engaged and find greater job satisfaction, investing energy in career development can be an enriching aspect of your work life.

1. **Write it down.** If your ideas about where you would like to be are not fully formed, taking out a pen and a sheet of paper is a great place to start. Make a mind map, jotting down keywords, images, and even names of people whose careers you admire. Once you have a general idea of where you would like to go, your pen-to-paper work can begin to take the form of lists: write down steps you need to take to get you where you would like to be. Keep returning to your career plan and fine-tuning it until you can see a concrete path that you can set off on.
2. **Speak about it.** Once you have a clear image of what you would like to aim for, begin to tell people. Tell people close to you like your friends, partner or family about your goals. Speaking about what you are dreaming of out loud actualizes it, bringing it out of the realm of fantasy and into the real world. Telling people close to you also means you will have their encouragement and support, as well as the extra push that comes with wanting to follow through on what you say.
3. **Invest in continuing education.** If you feel that your skills and experiences do not yet add up to what you need for your dream position, take a course to get you closer to where you want to be. This might be something offered through your workplace, a weekend seminar as part of a conference, or even a more formal training institution like a college or university. If balancing work and education seems daunting, take a look at these tips for staying on top of both commitments.
4. **Talk to those in charge.** When you feel confident in your abilities and ambitions, it can be a great idea to speak with your supervisor(s). Articulating your goals to the people you report to is a demonstration of your commitment to your work. Furthermore, they will be aware that you are interested in advancement, and are more likely to think of you when positions open up.

There are a lot of reasons we push thinking about career development to the back burner. Perhaps most obviously, it can feel risky to put yourself out there and become vulnerable to rejection or feeling like you are over your head. Keep in mind that challenges make our work rewarding, and seeking out opportunities for advancement can be an adventure that leads to deeper satisfaction both professionally and personally.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help through a variety of resources. Call your EAP at **1.866.468.9461** or visit shepell.com.