



Putting the *Skids* on Summer Slide

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WITH ALL THE HARD WORK you and your child have put into learning this year, you don't want to let summer slide take its toll. Hard to believe, but even the neurotypical child can lose from thirty to fifty percent of their learning over the summer break according to at least one study (Brookings.edu). For our students with ADHD who often have memory issues to start with, the amount of summer learning loss can multiply. What can a parent do to support retention of skills and knowledge over the summer?

When making decisions about summer activities be sure to involve your child. Some students may just be “burnt out” on school and need the opportunity to develop skills other than academics over the summer. Helping a child develop just one talent or personal interest as an alternative to academics, where they may struggle, can be a life changer.


For those families that would like a more leisurely approach to summer activities, a variety of specialized summer camps are available. Be sure to listen carefully to your child. Forcing your child to attend an academic program will be counterproductive. If you feel that your child has significant academic needs and is resistant, however, try offering choices. Here are some options to consider for direct academic support.

Formal summer programs

Consider investigating options available in your geographic area, such as the following kinds of programs or services.

Local extended school year program

The first stop may often be the extended school year program in your local public schools. The scope and quality of these programs varies widely, depending on your school district and their goals for summer learning. Some summer programs are only offered to students who qualify with academic delays deemed significant by the district. Other school districts offer enrichment programs. Be sure to investigate before committing your child to a program from which they



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may or may not benefit. If possible, talk with other parents whose children have attended the extended school year. When checking out your local school district programs, some questions to ask include:

- What hours does the program run? If the program is just a few hours long, you may need to find additional support before or afterward.
- How many weeks is the program in effect?
- Are students graded or do they receive credit for attendance?
- What sorts of behavioral support are available?
- What is the adult-to-student ratio?
- Does the curriculum focus on standards-based instruction or on recreational activities? How much of the day is devoted to direct instruction and how much is recreational in nature?
- Are related services such as speech and language and occupational therapy provided?
- Is homework assigned? Sometimes, having homework in the summer just adds pressure. For other students, it may be relevant. When my son was in high school—until I caught on—he tried to deliberately fail a course so he could take it in summer

school. He hated homework, and the summer program did not assign homework because the school did not assign homework then. Consequently, he thought he could ace the course if he took it during the summer.

- Who teaches the program? Will your child have the same teacher they had during the school year? Is this desirable?

Summer programs at private schools

Many private schools that offer services exclusively for students with special needs offer summer programs that can provide the opportunity for maintaining and catching up. For their school year program these schools generally have admissions requirements and sometimes a wait list. For many families the tuition cost for the school year can be a factor. Often, however, the summer program is more accessible and affordable. One example of a specialized private school program for secondary school students is Landmark College's High School Program and the Summer Bridge Experience program. You can locate private schools for students with special needs in your geographic area through the website of the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (see the Resources box at the end of this article).

Educational therapy

Educational therapists are professionals trained to tailor instruction individually to meet a child's needs. Educational therapists are different from tutors. Tutors may support your child on classroom assignments. Educational therapists are generally trained to offer support to the "whole child," addressing not only academic skills but also self-esteem and academically related behaviors such as executive function. ETs can also address specific benchmark goals on a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Some ETs provide services through clinics that offer other professional support such as counseling, psychological services, and speech and language services. Other ETs provide services independently.

In addition to providing individualized interventions for your child, there are some advantages to educational therapy services using an educational therapist. Often you can negotiate service hours around your child's schedule, and some ETs even provide services in your home environment. A

good ET should be able to establish a relationship with your child and communicate with the school to address your child's needs. You can learn more about educational therapy or find an ET in your area on the website of the Association of Educational Therapists (see Resources).

University and community colleges

Many universities and community colleges offer summer programs for elementary and/or secondary students. Again, the curriculum can range from leisure skills and interests to direct academic support. One advantage to many of these programs is the opportunity for access to specialized equipment and facilities not typically available on the public school campus. Examples that I have seen locally include such areas as introductory computer coding, podcasting, and video production. In addition to receiving instruction and the opportunity for new experiences, attending classes on a community college or college campus can be a morale booster and motivate students for future college attendance. The college experience feels more accessible.

Home strategies

After discussing options with your child and surveying resources, you may decide that for whatever reason, a home “vacay” is your child's best option. Whether your child is at home full-time or for just the evenings, there are many things you can do to optimize chances that they will maintain skills and knowledge over the summer.



Structure, structure, structure.



Maintain routines that were successful during the school year. For example, if you and your child decide that a later bedtime is warranted for the summer, set the time and stick to it. Have a regular

wake-up time in the morning. Continue to reinforce morning routines and hygiene habits. Consider planning a daily schedule and posting it, along with a calendar that includes special events such as travel time and other special events. In consultation with your child's physician, you may also want to consider continuing medication over the summer to help your child be available for learning experiences.

Spend time outdoors and continue to monitor screen time.

Your child will intimately be happier and healthier if they have some outdoor time. Incorporate educational YouTube videos and online sites into your child's schedule.



Maintain and introduce new chores.



Chores can foster a sense of belonging and self-esteem that is essential for all kids. Involve your child in summer tasks such as gardening and yardwork.

Read and the force will be with you!

I remember seeing this on a poster as I took my son into the public library for a reading hour. There are many ways to continue reading activities during the summer in a fun and enjoyable way. Many public libraries offer summer programs for kids that include rewards for books read, reading clubs, and story hours.



Try DEAR—Drop Everything And Read. This is a five- to seven-minute period scheduled daily when you and your child stop to read. Don't forget to model reading behavior yourself during this time. Read

aloud with your child. This activity can be appropriate all the way through middle school. Make family reading hour a habit. Try activities such as Reader's Theater, where each family member reads a part. The Reader's Theater All Year website offers free scripts for all ages and interests.

Make math fun.



Games such as *Money*, *Monopoly*, *Blokus*, and card games are math-based. Keeping score during games exercises arithmetic skills. Try starting a business; encourage your child's ideas such as

lemonade stands and plant sales. Involve your child in cooking projects that require use of fractions and measurement. Support them in building projects that involve measurement. Take your child shopping. Have them write up a shopping list, project the cost, and keep track of the amount. Watch sports with your child and have her keep score or follow her favorite player. If you are planning a road, trip, include your child in the planning to provide mapping experience. Help them to keep track of their personal spending or of the family expenses on the road.

Keep a journal and/or photo album, write emails and letters.



Whether you are traveling to exotic places or to a local park or sports event, have your child keep a daily journal. This can be a photo album or scrapbook in which your child writes

captions, or a complete daily written record of activities. Try dialogue journals in which you write a question and your child answers, and vice versa. Leave humorous written messages around the house for your child to discover.

Schedule field trips to local museums and cultural events.



Include your child in the choice of activities and take friends when possible. Visit a planetarium or aquarium, go to the symphony or ballet. Some communities offer children's theater productions.



LEARNING SLIDE CAN BE STOPPED through summer programs and activities that provide fun and encourage personal growth. Plan ahead for academic programs, and plan to enjoy time together in engaging activities with your child. **A**



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Department of Education, she provided trainings for teachers and parents about ADHD throughout Northern California. She has appeared on National Public Radio, spoken at numerous conferences, and was named CHADD's Educator of the Year. In addition, she is the parent of a young adult with ADHD, a CHADD coordinator, and Parent to Parent trainer. She also serves as a member of the editorial advisory board of CHADD's *Attention* magazine.

ADDITIONAL READING

Megan Kuhfeld and Karyn Lewis. Is Summer Learning Loss Real, and Does It Widen Test Score Gaps by Family Income? Brookings, January 30, 2023. brookings.edu/articles/is-summer-learning-loss-real-and-does-it-widen-test-score-gaps-by-family-income/

David M. Quinn and Morgan Polikoff. Summer Learning Loss: What Is It, and What Can We Do About It? Brookings, September 14, 2017. brookings.edu/articles/summer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/

Alexis Clark. Educational Therapy, What You Need to Know. understood.org/en/articles/what-you-need-to-know-about-educational-therapy

ORGANIZATIONS & PROGRAMS

Association of Educational Therapists (AET) aetonline.org/parents-community/find-an-et

National Association of Private School Education Centers (NAPSEC) napsec.org/find-a-program

ACTIVITIES

Readers Theater All Year: Building Leaders and Creators readerstheaterallyear.com. Free scripts for all ages and reading levels

SplashLearn splashlearn.com. Free learning games for kids