



A monthly publication provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education.

Resources for Families

May 2010

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Building learning into your child's summer activities

One of the things about summer many children appreciate is a break from the daily school routine. While your children enjoy the chance to relax, they can also benefit from some foresight in helping them be prepared to transition back to school when summer ends. Help your kids by including learning opportunities into everyday life throughout the summer. Here are some ideas suggested by teachers.

Have your child plan a party

Give your children a budget, and let them pick the theme and the menu. They can send out the invitations, make the decorations, and prepare some or all of the food. Children will learn to work together, and they'll use math skills to stick to the budget.

Work on jigsaw puzzles as a family

Puzzles help children with spatial awareness. Start with a small puzzle and work up to a larger one with 500 or more pieces. Take a photo of the family with the finished puzzle. Then take the puzzle apart and trade it with another puzzle enthusiast.

Make up silly stories to build language skills

Start with a commercial book of Mad Libs, those funny fill-in-the-blanks stories, then make your own for vocabulary-building and storytelling skills. Have kids type the stories on the computer and draw the illustrations.

Give your children a tape recorder

Kids can record themselves reading stories, telling about adventures they have had, or making up their own stories. At night or in the car, listen to your children's recordings. Type their stories on the computer and have them illustrate them.

Play "restaurant" at home using takeout menus and play money

Have children place orders and tally up the bill. Encourage children to make their own menus on the computer, using creative vocabulary. Try to create some of their adventurous dishes in the kitchen.

Enlist children's help with laundry

They can count socks by twos, organize clothes by color, count shoes, and reorganize the closets and dresser drawers.

Paint

Use finger paint—find recipes online to make your own or use commercial watercolor or tempera paint. Find a scenic spot outside or set up a still life to build observational skills. Talk with your children about their paintings. Which colors did they choose and why?

Make a scrapbook

Gather photos, mementos, and notes and compile them into a summer memory book. Each child can make his or her own scrapbook, and each will reflect a different point of view.

Use word magnets to practice grammar and vocabulary

Buy magnetic tape and write words with a marker. Using a cookie sheet, have your children arrange the words to make a sentence. Make it challenging by asking for a four-word sentence, then a five-word sentence and longer. For older children, request specific types of sentences: declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory.



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Have a math/vocabulary question of the day

Write out a daily math problem or vocabulary word, and have your children write the definition or the answer by dinner time. Assign each child a different color marker. Keep a log of vocabulary words so you can start reviewing toward the end of the summer.

For a fun summer filled with learning experiences undetectable to the average child, think like a teacher. If your kids love making forts when it rains, encourage them to calculate the area. If they love to play board games, enlist them to create a new board game using vocabulary words. If your children need to work on math skills, challenge them to invent a secret code and write notes back and forth in code all summer.

With a little creativity, you can find a way to slip a little math and language arts into just about any activity.

Here's a final idea for summer learning. Have each child write a thank-you note to his or her last year's teacher. Also, have them write introduction letters to their new teachers, telling about their family, likes and dislikes, favorite activities, favorite books, activities during the summer, etc. They can present the letters to their teachers when school starts.



Healthy habits for happy families

Communication in relationships

1. Every day share something you appreciate about each other. Even simple things like “I like the way you laugh” will make a partner feel noticed and valued.
2. Describe your hopes and dreams so that your partner can help make them happen. Some examples might be: “I’d like to run a marathon in the next two years” or “I want to learn how to speak Spanish.”
3. Always let each other know when plans change. Remembering simple things like “I’ll have to be out of town an extra day” is crucial to staying in sync and feeling connected.
4. Clear up big or little mysteries before they become suspicions, jealousies, false assumptions, or resentments. You may need to ask a specific question such as “You promised you’d pick up the dry cleaning after work. What happened?”
5. State what you want rather than what you don’t want. Instead of “I get angry when you don’t leave messages,” say “When you get my voice mail, please don’t say ‘it’s me’ and hang up. Tell me what you were calling about.”

Source: www.smartmarriages.com

Building supportive relationships

Talk to one person about your feelings.

Help someone else by volunteering.

Have lunch or coffee with a friend.

Accompany someone to the movies, a concert, or a small get-together.

Call or e-mail an old friend.

Go for a walk with a workout buddy.

Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club.

Confide in a counselor, therapist, or clergy member.

Source: helpguide.org

Exercise to relieve stress and depression

After decades of investigation, there is now indisputable evidence that regular physical exercise can relieve and perhaps even prevent stress, anxiety, and depression – especially for women, who tend to suffer from these problems more often than men. Research also shows that exercise can treat depression and prevent relapses in some older individuals as effectively as antidepressant drugs. Exercise may even reverse some of the mental decline that can occur with aging, probably because it improves blood flow to the brain.

Boost your mood by:

Exercise now...and again

Research shows that a 10- minute walk can improve your mood for two hours. Another study demonstrates that 10 minutes of pedaling on a stationary bike is enough to make you feel better, at least temporarily. The key to sustaining mood benefits is to exercise regularly – stop exercising, and the psychological lift will disappear. The converse is also true: If you’re used to regular physical activity, your mood will suffer if you take an exercise vacation.

Choose moderately intense activities

Aerobic exercise, such as walking and swimming, undoubtedly has mental health benefits, but you don’t need to sweat strenuously to see results.

Continuous/rhythmic exercise is best

Walking, swimming, dancing, stationary biking, and yoga are good choices.

Be wary of competitive sports

Exercise that pits people head-to-head with opponents may be too stressful, leading to a bad mood in the face of defeat. If you’re the type whose competitive spirit may get the better of you, choose a physical activity that you enjoy and that allows you to de-stress.

Add a mind-body element

Activities such as yoga and tai chi rest your mind and pump up your energy. If you don’t want to do yoga or similar exercises, you can add a meditative element to walking or swimming by repeating a mantra (a word or phrase) as you move.



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Start slowly, and don't overdo it

More isn't better. Athletes who over-train find their moods drop rather than lift. You also risk injury and boredom if you push too hard, fast, or far.

Source: Johns Hopkins Health Alerts

How to make better choices at fast food restaurants

Making healthier choices at fast food restaurants is easier if you prepare ahead by checking guides that show you the nutritional content of meal choices. Free downloadable guides can help you evaluate your options.

If you don't prepare ahead of time, common sense guidelines can help to make your meal healthier. For example, a seemingly healthy salad can be a diet minefield when smothered in high-fat dressing and fried toppings, so choose a salad with fresh veggies, grilled toppings and a lighter dressing. Portion control is also important, as many fast food restaurants serve enough food for several meals in the guise of a single serving.

Tips for healthy eating:

Make careful menu selections

Dishes labeled deep-fried, pan-fried, basted, batter-dipped, breaded, creamy, crispy, scalloped, Alfredo, au gratin or in cream sauce are usually high in calories, unhealthy fats or sodium. Order items with more vegetables and choose leaner meats.

Drink water with your meal

Soda is a huge source of hidden calories. Try adding a little lemon to your water or ordering unsweetened iced tea.

“Undress” your food

When choosing items, be aware of calorie- and fat-packed salad dressings, spreads, cheese, sour cream, etc. You can ask for a packet of ketchup or mustard and add it yourself, controlling how much you put on your sandwich.

Don't be afraid to special order

Many menu items would be healthy if it weren't for the way they are prepared. Ask for your vegetables and main dishes to be served without the sauces. Ask for olive oil and vinegar for salads or order the dressing “on the side” and spoon only a small amount on at a time. If food is fried or cooked in oil or butter, ask to have it broiled or steamed.

Watch portion size

Choose a smaller portion size, order a side salad instead of fries, and don't supersize anything. At a typical restaurant, a single serving provides enough for two meals. Take half home or divide the portion with a dining partner.

Watch your salt

Fast food restaurant food tends to be very high in sodium, a major contributor to high blood pressure. Don't add insult to injury by adding more salt.

Avoid buffets – even the salad bar

If you do choose buffet dining, opt for fresh fruits, salads with olive oil and vinegar or low-fat dressings, broiled entrees and steamed vegetables. Resist the temptation to go for seconds.

Eat mindfully

Pay attention to what you eat and savor each bite. Chew your food thoroughly and avoid eating on the run. Being mindful also means stopping before you are full.

Remember the big picture

Think of eating out in the context of your whole diet. If it is a special occasion, or you know you want to order your favorite meal at a nice restaurant, make sure your earlier meals that day are extra healthy. Moderation is always key, but planning ahead can help you relax and enjoy your dining out experience while maintaining good nutrition and diet control.

Source: helpguide.org



Curb spending

Make a list before you go shopping. When you get home, check the list again, and return anything that wasn't on it.

Leave the tags on until you're sure you will keep an item. Only stores with the most generous return policies will accept returns without original tags.

Wait 30 minutes before making a purchase. Sometimes if you walk away from an item, you won't want to go back for it.

Take only the cash you'll need for the day, and leave your credit cards at home. Ask a friend to tell you "no" when you feel the urge to spend needlessly.

Return it. Store all receipts in the same place so you can find them quickly and easily. If you know you've spent too much on an item or find that you don't really like it when you get it home, take it back as soon as possible.

Don't pretend it didn't happen. Admitting your spending mistakes will help you gain the insight you need not to repeat them.

Source: National Endowment for Financial Education, www.smartaboutmoney.org.