

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Parenting: The Summer Learning Loss Phenomenon

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Did you know that the long summer vacation breaks the rhythm of instruction, and leads to children forgetting academic skills that have learned over the past year? According to the National Summer Learning Association (2015), if a child's brain isn't occupied or learning, it is possible for his or her skills to regress. There is even a name for this dreaded phenomenon, which is supported by over 100 years of research. It is called "Summer Learning Loss" or the "Summer Slide."

Summer is a time of year that most if not all children look forward to, as it is a time of fun, frolicking, beach going, camping, sports playing and traveling. The books are thrown into the corner, uniforms strewn across the floor, the thumbs get ready for the video games

and the eyes are primed for a marathon of television watching. Many parents welcome the break from school. They think it is much deserved after nine or ten months of structured instruction. Even though summer is a break from school it should not be a break from learning. According to research:

- Low-income children, by the end of fifth grade, are about 2.5 to 3 years behind their more affluent peers. This is primarily due to summer learning loss. (Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH*, 66(3), 227-268. EJ 596 384.)
- On average, students lose about 2.6 months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills during the summer. (Cooper, 1996).
- Students experience significant learning loss when they do not participate in educational activities during the summer months. Research shows that students on average score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer than they do on the same tests at the end of the school year. Low-income students experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers. On average, middle-income students experience slight gains in reading performance during summer vacation. Low-income students experience about a two month loss in reading achievement (Cooper, 1996).
- The research shows that achievement for both middle-and lower-income students improves at a similar rate during the school year, however, the achievement gap in reading scores between higher and lower income students increases significantly over the summer vacation (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996).
- Two-thirds of the ninth grade reading achievement gap can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years; nearly one-third of the gap is already present when children begin school (Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., and Olson, L. 2007).
- Early summer learning losses have later life consequences, including high school completion, and whether children attend college (Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., and Olson, L. 2007).

References:

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Combating Summer Learning Loss

Did you know that six weeks in the new school year is spent re-learning old material in order to compensate for Summer Learning loss? Did you know that it can take up to two months from the first day of school for a student's brain to get back on track? Did you know that as early as grade one summer learning loss can be recognized?

Here are a few suggestions which may assist in combating Summer Learning Loss

- Allocate time for learning each day.
- Design a Summer Learning curriculum for your child.
- Purchase or download age/ grade level workbooks such as Summer Bridge Activities.
- Compile a Reading List/Challenge for your child. • Create a Summer Spelling Challenge for your child.
- Create a Summer Mathematics Challenge for your child.
- Have your child write a daily journal, a creative story or book.
- Have your child learn a foreign language such as French or Spanish - Rosetta Stone can prove beneficial.
- Visit the library often.
- Enroll your child in an educational or skills based Summer Camp or Program.
- Assist your child in seeking volunteer opportunities.
- Monitor the recreational use of television, computer, electronic and other technological devices.

Summer Break: A Time for Enrichment and Getting Ahead

In his treatise *the Art of Thinking* (1928), Abbé Dimnet declared, "Children have to be educated, but they have also to be left to educate themselves."

I concur with Dimnet, however, I don't think that summer or three months of doing absolutely nothing is what he was making reference to, as children ought to be continuously learning, even during these carefree summer months.

According to the National Summer Learning Association, the summer months should be used by children to branch out or get ahead of their studies. It should also be used to catch up on lessons that one's child may have missed or did not perfect throughout the school year. It should be used to stretch one's mind and learn new skills. Summer should be used constructively, as a head start for the next school year.

At the end of the school year, consult with your child's teacher or teachers in order to find out those areas in which your child needs improvement. Ask the teacher for suggestions, books, or recommendations on how you can assist your child in improving his or her skills over the summer break.

Most importantly, if your child is moving to another grade seek an audience with your child's teacher or teachers to find out what his or her expectations for the next school year will be and again ask for suggestions on how you can facilitate a smooth transition into the next school year or give your child a head start.

Summer could also be used as a platform for the rest of your child's life. If your child wants a career as a journalist; he or she may volunteer at a media organization. If he or she wants to be a veterinarian he or she may choose to volunteer at a local farm, the department of agriculture or a school of veterinary studies. If your child wants to be a teacher or pediatrician, have your child volunteer at a local daycare/nursery so that he or she may gain a greater understanding of young children. If your child wants to be a designer or seamstress have him or her volunteer with a designer or seamstress. If he or she has an interest in the culinary arts, seek out a restaurateur or hotel and ask for volunteer opportunities. These are invaluable opportunities for learning. Learning doesn't have to be structured or rigid.

Quotes on Learning

"Learning never exhausts the mind." Leonardo Da Vinci

"You cannot open a book without learning something." Confucius

"Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere." Chinese Proverb

"The best of my education has come from the public library... my tuition fee is a bus fare and once in a while, five cents a day for an overdue book. You don't need to know very much to start with, if you know the way to the public library." Lesley Conger

Recommended Reading for Young Children

The Book with No Pictures – by B.J. Novak

Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are! – by Dr. Seuss

What Pet Should I Get? – by Dr. Seuss