

How to maximize your child's school vacation while beating the summer slide

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Ah, summer. The wait for the warmer weather and longer days is over. Vacation is just around the corner. And traffic on the way to work is not as bad.

But for [parents](#) with [young children](#), summer means no school or after-school activities, which are replaced with the hassle of keeping kids safe, engaged and entertained. Also, [academic development](#) does not stop in the eight to 12 weeks between the [school years](#), so parents are on their own there, too.

Northeastern Global News spoke to Jessica Hoffman, professor in the department of applied psychology at Northeastern University and a certified school psychologist, about how parents can make sure their [children](#) get the most out of the summer break.

Provide structure to a child's day

Schools provide much more than just education, Hoffman says. They facilitate socialization, provide access to food, and promote physical health by scheduling regular physical activities and limiting the intake of high-sugar snacks and drinks.

They also provide oversight and structure for children, which enables them to focus on purposeful activities.

"A certain amount of structure is important for all kids," Hoffman says. "How much supervision the child needs, and how much structure would be helpful for them is something that parents really need to figure out for their children, because it differs by child."

Structure can be achieved by having a meal schedule, putting together a reading list, designing a bucket list of things to do during the summer, identifying new skills children are interested in learning, or signing them up for day or overnight camps.

Overnight camps can teach children to become more independent, develop new skills and build closer friendships. Hoffman recommends

starting with a shorter stay away from home, then assessing if the child would like to go for longer the next year.

She has noticed, however, that camps are more expensive since the COVID-19 pandemic. To find more affordable activities, Hoffman says parents can talk to other parents or check programming at the local library, community center or YMCA.

How to prevent 'summer slide'

Summer break is long, Hoffman says, and the [academic skills](#) that children have acquired in the most recent school year tend to be lost. To make sure a child starts out the next school year close to where they left off, encourage them to keep up with their reading and [math skills](#).

"This is even more important now," she says, "because the schooling interruptions during the COVID pandemic have created a situation where kids' academic skills in reading and math are lower nationally than they were before."

Depending on the age of a child, they can read anything from cereal boxes to comics to novels. She recommends going to the library with the child and coming up with a list of books they would like to read.

"Set the expectation to read each day even for just 15–20 minutes," Hoffman says. "It's important for children to read all summer long."

Parents can set a good example by talking to children about their own reading lists.

Math skills can be practiced every day, too, during cooking, shopping, driving from one location to another or eating out.

"Be cognizant of how you use math every day and verbalize it to the children," Hoffman says. "If we're eating out, and we want to give a 20% tip, how much is the tip? And how much is the total meal?"

Foster independence

It is the responsibility of parents to help their children be more independent and experience incremental successes, Hoffman says.

Hoffman suggests discussing with a child what kind of independent activity they would like to try. It could be going to a corner store or riding a bike to a playground, for example.

Before sending the child off, parents should review safety guidelines—how the child is going to get from point A to point B, ways to get in touch with the parent or how they will act if a stranger approaches them.

After the child returns, talk about how it went, Hoffman says, congratulate them for being independent and loop back to whether they have followed the guidelines.

Monitor and limit screen time

When children are left without structure all day, they tend to spend more time playing games, and watching TV and videos. That leads to increased snacking, which is why parents should think about activities that promote physical health.

With [older children](#), parents should monitor their use of social media and what they're accessing online.

"Social interactions that happen face-to-face can now happen online as well," Hoffman says. "For example, bullying can get carried over into the online space."

They might feel excluded or like they are missing out on something.

"Social relationships are front and center for adolescence," Hoffman says.

They crave time with friends, which might be a highlight of their summer.

Family and play time

Families can also plan local or far-away trips, engage with nature and wildlife, and learn history together by traveling to landmarks.

When they experience the world this way, they learn new words and build reading comprehension.

Children also require time without structure to be creative, play or relax.

"It's important to have a balance between where there's supervision and when there's focus, and the lack of structure, where kids can relax and do what they want," Hoffman says. "You want to try to strike that balance, depending on the needs of your child and your family."

Provided by Northeastern University

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