

Summer Matters

*Easy Ways
Families Can Support
Summer Learning*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 3

Plan for summer reading
Play + learning = fun

Page 4

A reading-friendly environment
Explore social studies
Limit screen time, boost physical activity

Page 5

Make the most of the public library
Sleep habits for success
Learning through nature

Page 6

Get ready for the classroom
Everyday writing
Bite into reading

Page 7

The power of “thinking questions”
Explore your town

Page 8

Let’s tell math stories!
Find teachable moments

This summer, you can help your child maintain skills and even make gains in learning while you spend quality time together as a family. The ideas and activities in this guide will help your child return to school in the fall ready to learn—and fit into even the busiest schedules. That’s because learning can be a natural part of things your family is already doing, from everyday activities like riding in the car and cooking dinner to summertime traditions like visiting relatives or going to the pool.

You don’t always have to set aside special “learning time.” In this guide, you’ll learn how to include reading and writing in your child’s daily activities, find teachable moments everywhere you go and add learning to playtime. You’ll discover ways to ask questions that stimulate your child’s thinking, tell math stories together, explore nature and dive into your family’s history and culture.

Keep this guide handy over the summer. Pick it up now and then, and select an activity that will fit the day ahead. When school starts, your child will be ready to hit the ground running!



Plan for summer reading

When families make a plan for summer reading, children tend to read more. That's important, because students' reading skills often take a dip over the summer. In school, children read every day. At home during the summer, that doesn't always happen. But with a little planning, you can *make* it happen. Here's how:

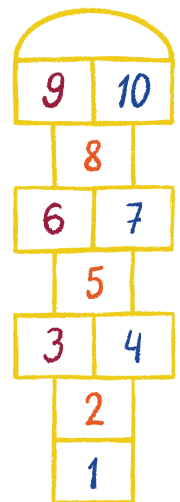


- **Get your child excited about reading.** Say things like, "I'm looking forward to having plenty of time to read together this summer!" or "Which books should we take with us on vacation?" Your enthusiasm is likely to rub off on your child.
- **Schedule regular library trips.** Putting frequent library visits on your calendar at the beginning of the summer shows your child that reading is a priority. It also ensures that your child will have fresh and exciting reading material all summer long. Be sure to consider available transportation options when choosing your library days.
- **Create a reading-friendly environment.** Set your child up for success by filling your home with books, magazines, catalogs and other items your child will look forward to picking up and reading.
- **Set personalized reading goals.** Rethink traditional goals like "I will read 10 books" or "I will read for 30 minutes a day." Goals that are meaningful to your child might look more like this: "I'm going to learn all I can about Komodo dragons" or "I'm going to finish my favorite graphic novel series."
- **Keep a record of summer reading.** Have your child write titles of completed books on strips of construction paper and link them into a colorful paper chain. At the end of the summer, looking at the chain will give your child a sense of accomplishment.

Play + learning = fun

Whether your child is playing alone, with friends or with you, a lot of learning takes place. In fact, play is critical to children's brain development. While children learn naturally through free play without adult help, you can sometimes offer suggestions or provide materials that add even more learning opportunities. Get started with these activities:

- **Blocks.** When your child builds with blocks, provide paper and pencil for drawing "blueprints" of buildings. Point out that your child will be able to make favorite structures again and again by referring to the blueprints!
- **Hopscotch.** Write sight words or math problems in the squares. Your child reads each word or solves each problem while hopping across the board.
- **Board games.** Reading, writing, math, memory ... board games teach many skills. Appoint your child scorekeeper or banker for extra math practice. Put your child in charge of reading trivia questions aloud.
- **Pretend play.** Suggest that your child read aloud to dolls and stuffed animals while caring for them. Put a notepad and pencil with your child's toy kitchen for making "grocery lists" and writing "recipes." Give your child coins, "price tags" (self-stick notes) and a "cash register" (calculator) for playing store.
- **Ball games.** How many baskets can your child make in one minute? If your child attempts 10 soccer goals, what fraction or percentage of shots make it in the goal?



A reading-friendly environment

It's a lazy summer afternoon. Your child is bored and looking for something to do. Imagine that the TV remote is within reach, and so are a tablet and a video game console. Or imagine this: On the coffee table, there's a book of jokes and a children's magazine about dogs. The bookshelf contains a colorful selection of picture books and a volume of poetry from the library.

Your child is more likely to read when a variety of appealing materials are readily available. Try these ideas:

- **Keep books in plain sight**, on a bookshelf or in a basket.
- **Stock your car with reading materials.** Let your child decorate a special container to keep them in. Download audiobooks from the library or an online bookstore to listen to on the go.
- **Collect catalogs, recipes, comic strips,** grocery circulars, old magazines, etc. Store the items in a reading basket or folder on the kitchen counter.
- **Take reading along on family trips.** It's a great way to pass the time on buses, trains or planes. Your child can read in a tent or by a campfire, on the beach or in a hotel room. If you visit relatives, enjoy special reading time with grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins.



Explore social studies

Spend some time this summer exploring history, culture and geography—starting with your very own family. Here's how.

- **Learn about your family.** Show your child photo albums, yearbooks, certificates and awards. Share items from your culture or written in your home language like coins, postcards and family recipes. If you visit relatives, ask them to share family treasures and talk about family history and culture.
- **Dive into local history.** Go to a visitor center, look for local history materials at the library and read historical markers and plaques or engravings on buildings.
- **Discover geography.** Point out relatives' birthplaces on a map. Look for out-of-state license plates when you're on the road. Print out a United States map and let your child color the state for each plate you find. How many states can your child color by the end of the summer?

Limit screen time, boost physical activity

It may be tempting to give your child extra screen time on long summer days. But a combination of two strategies—reducing screen time and increasing physical activity—can improve your child's memory, attention span and self-control. Here are some ways to boost activity while limiting screen time:



- **Turn on music and dance** instead of watching videos. When your child does watch videos, make them musical ones—and have your child get up and dance along with them.
- **Fill a basket with active toys** (jump rope, balls, etc.). Take it outside and leave devices inside.
- **Play balancing games** instead of phone games to pass time while waiting. How long can you stand on one foot? Is it easier to balance on your left foot or your right foot? What happens when you close your eyes while balancing?

Make the most of the public library



Kick off summer with a time-honored tradition: Sign your child up for the library's summer reading program. Then, plan to visit the library regularly to check out books—and much more, including:

- **Have reading playdates.** Let your child invite a friend to go to the library. They can pick out books, then find a nice spot to settle in for an afternoon of reading.
- **Go on a “treasure hunt.”** Together, list summer activities like lemonade stands, swimming, playground trips, family cookouts, etc. Search the library for stories or nonfiction books related to items on the list.
- **Attend special events** like story hours, puppet shows, author visits, children's classes, etc.
- **Check out books** in your family's home language. You'll build reading comprehension skills that will carry over when your child reads in English.

Sleep habits for success

Staying alert in school is critical for learning. And a good night's sleep is the best way to ensure that happens. Here are things families can do during the summer to prepare:



- **Follow a bedtime routine** that helps your child settle down. For many families, this includes a warm bath and a bedtime story. Turn off screens at least one hour before bedtime since they can interfere with falling asleep and staying asleep.
- **Adjust your child's sleep schedule.** If your child has been staying up and sleeping in later this summer, use the last few weeks of break to gradually get back to normal. And if your young child naps during the day, start shortening naps and making bedtime earlier. By the time school starts, your child should be able to stay awake all day and sleep 9 to 12 hours per night.

Learning through nature

Research shows that nature-based learning boosts children's academic achievement. Try these activities as you and your child enjoy nature together:

- **Encourage your child to collect natural items** like rocks, seashells, leaves, flowers, acorns, buckeyes, etc. At home, your child can sort, count, label and sketch them. What are some ways your child might sort the objects? (Sort flowers by number of petals, arrange acorns by size, etc.) Give your child a magnifying glass to observe the items closely. What details can your child see and include in a sketch? (Spirals on seashells, veins on leaves, etc.)
- **Make a trail guide.** Go to a park or nature area. Let your child draw and label landmarks like streams, fallen logs, tree stumps, ponds, bridges and trail markers. Your child can use the guide to lead your family on a hike.
- **Go stargazing.** Stars are part of nature, too. Get a library book about constellations or look them up online. See how many you and your child can spot in the sky at night. Afterward, your child can use a white or yellow crayon to draw constellations on black paper. Also let your child arrange rocks on the sidewalk to form favorite constellations and draw lines with sidewalk chalk to connect the “stars.”



Source: “Experiences of Nature Boost Children's Learning,” Science Daily, 3/12/19.

Get ready for the classroom

School isn't just about academics. Your child needs to get along well with others and follow classroom routines, too. But those skills often get a little rusty over the summer, just like reading and math skills do. To help your child practice them:

- **Have your child spend time with other kids.** Visit neighborhood playgrounds and pools, and arrange play dates. Consider signing your child up for an organized activity through the parks and recreation department, a community center or a place of worship.
- **Follow routines.** Children are better able to regulate their behavior when they know what to expect and when they're not tired or hungry. Have regular meals and snacks, and try to have your child go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day.
- **Stick with rules and consequences.** It's easy to let rules slide over the summer. But your child will find it easier to show positive behavior in school this fall if expectations are consistent at home.

Everyday writing

You don't need to assign your child a report to build writing skills this summer. Instead, help your child see writing as a useful part of your family's life. To encourage daily writing:

- **Start a family conversation journal.** Write back and forth to each other throughout the summer. Share what surprised or delighted you today, write a funny joke or explain something new you learned.
- **Become e-pals with relatives.** Emails let your child stay in touch with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins while practicing writing. At the end of the summer, your child will love looking back through all the messages.
- **Display a menu board.** Have your child write the menus for cookouts, picnics, family dinners, etc. on a chalkboard or white board. Explain that adjectives (descriptive words) make food sound appealing. ("Tasty turkey burgers. Sweet summer corn. Juicy watermelon.")
- **Make packing lists.** Your child can write what to take on vacation, to the pool, on a hike, to a sleepover, etc.



Bite into reading

Small amounts of reading add up over time and make a positive difference in your child's reading ability. Encourage your child to enjoy bite-sized "tastes" of reading all day long with these opportunities.

- **Weather reports.** Have your child read the forecast aloud to your family each morning.
- **Closed captions.** Turn down the TV volume and encourage your child to read the words on the screen.
- **Restaurant menus.** Ask to keep a menu at the table after you order. Your child can get extra reading practice while you wait for your meal. Or pick up some take-out menus and bring them home.
- **Game instructions.** On family game night, put your child in charge of reading the instructions and teaching everyone how to play.
- **Recipes.** Ask your child to gather the ingredients listed, then read the steps to you as you cook.

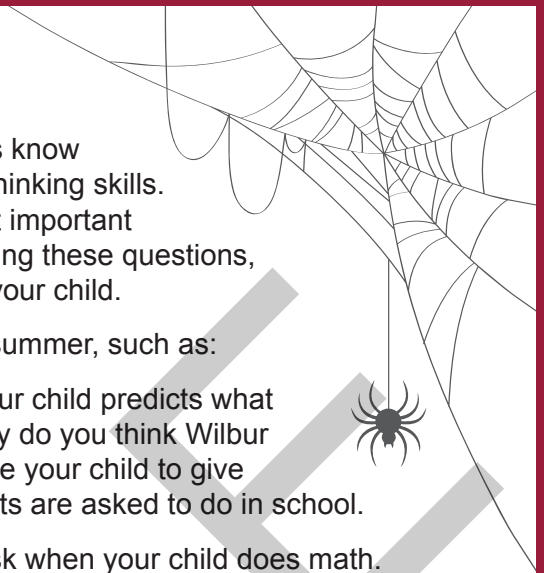


The power of “thinking questions”

Want to help your child do better in every subject? Teachers know that asking the right kinds of questions can build students’ thinking skills. Keep in mind that *you* are a teacher, too—the first and most important one your child will ever have. If you get into the habit of asking these questions, thinking this way will soon feel perfectly natural to you and your child.

Try asking “thinking questions” at home and on the go this summer, such as:

- **“Why do you think ...?”** Ask this question when your child predicts what will happen next in a book, a movie or real life. (“Why do you think Wilbur and Charlotte will become friends?”) You’ll encourage your child to give evidence to support a prediction—something students are asked to do in school.
- **“How do you know?”** This is a great question to ask when your child does math. (“How do you know there are ten dimes in a dollar?”) Children are frequently expected to explain their math thinking in school. It gives teachers insight into what they’ve learned, and often, these explanations lead children to self-correct their wrong answers.
- **“What do you notice?”** Try asking your child this when you encounter something new or interesting. Whether you’re examining an old family photo or peering into a pond, you’ll encourage your child to make observations.
- **“What do you wonder?”** Use this question to spark curiosity. Your child may wonder how you’re related to the people in the photo or what kinds of animals live in a pond. Share what you wonder, too.
- **“How could we find out?”** Head to the library or go online together to find answers to your child’s “wonderings.”



Explore your town

This summer, be a tourist—in your own town. Look for free or low-cost places and events where your child will learn new things. Here are a few examples:

- **Go to a farmer’s market** and teach your child the names of fruits and vegetables. Ask the farmers questions to help your child learn more: “What’s your favorite way to cook kale?” “Which kind of apple tastes the sweetest?”
- **Visit a pet supply store.** Observe how fish swim, eat and interact. Together, read signs on aquariums to learn about the different kinds of fish.
- **Watch planes take off and land** at the airport. Point out planes gathering speed before takeoff or slowing down rapidly once their wheels touch the runway. Talk about jobs people do at an airport (pilot, flight attendant, baggage handler, air traffic controller, etc.).
- **Attend a free summer concert series.** Your child can learn the names of musical styles and instruments.
- **Tour a museum.** A lot of learning can take place at art, science, history and maritime museums. Your child may discover a new style of art to try or develop an interest in dinosaurs, for example. While you’re there, look for hands-on exhibits and activities for students. Many museums offer free-admission days or discounted tickets.



Let's tell math stories!

Children are sometimes anxious about solving story problems and word problems in math. After all, these types of problems require students to read and understand a paragraph, figure out what they're being asked to do, write a math problem and finally, solve the problem. That's a lot to handle all at once!

You can help your child get used to story problems by weaving them into everyday life. Then they'll seem less intimidating when your child solves them in school. Try these examples when:

- **Eating.** Keep the cereal box or cracker box on the table. Give each other word problems using the "Nutrition Facts" box.
 - "There are 17 servings of cereal in the box. If we each eat 1 serving, how many servings are left?"
 - "One serving equals 1 ½ cups. If you ate ½ of a serving, how much would that be?"
- **Traveling.** In the car or on the bus, use road signs to make up story problems.
 - "The speed limit was 65 on the highway. On this road, it's 45. How much slower do we need to go on this road than on the highway?"
 - "Gas costs \$3.99 per gallon at the station on the left and \$4.07 at the station on the right. How much more does gas cost at the station on the right?"
- **Waiting.** At the doctor's or dentist's office, take turns inventing problems related to time.
 - "Your appointment is at 10:10. It's 9:57. How many more minutes do we have until your appointment?"
 - "We waited 10 minutes to be called. Now we've waited 5 minutes for the doctor. What's our total waiting time so far?"
- **Grocery shopping.** Make up problems while weighing produce.
 - "We need 5 pounds of potatoes for potato salad. The scale says 3.7 pounds. How many more pounds of potatoes do we need?"
 - "These 4 apples weigh 1 lb. 6 oz. How much does 1 apple weigh?"



Find teachable moments

You and your child are walking down the street on a sunny day when suddenly, out of the clear blue sky, it starts raining. You've just walked into a *sun shower*—and stumbled upon a teachable moment.

A teachable moment is a learning opportunity that happens naturally. Encourage your child to ask questions and look up explanations for moments like:

- **Weather events.** Where does rain come from in a sunny sky? Why do we see lightning before we hear thunder?
- **Putting on sunscreen.** Why do we need to wear it? What causes a sunburn?
- **Watching fireworks.** Why does the sky stay smoky long after the show is over?
- **Building a sandcastle.** Why does sand in a bucket appear to shrink when you add water?
- **Making lemonade.** Why does sugar seem to disappear when you stir it into water?