



How to Help Children Retain Skills over the Summer Break

Children often have a hard time retaining skills during the summer break. Many parents enroll children in summer school or extended school year, but this often is an abbreviated and less structured version of the school day. Even when children are educated at home, summer often involves routine changes. Since many children rely on consistent instruction, these changes can result in regression. This article includes strategies for preventing regression and teaching new skills.

1. Know What Skills to Work On - To prevent regression know what skills your child is working on and their current functioning level. Be sure to review their school progress reports, IEP (if applicable), and information from their teacher on summer reading and work. For children working on self-care, independence, or behavior skills, take data on their current progress. Be sure to ask their teachers and therapists what skills they are working on and exactly where they stand.

2. Find Opportunities to Practice Skills - Many skills can be integrated into a daily routine. Dressing, self-care, and behavior naturally occur during the day. Take time to use these natural occurrences as learning opportunities. For example, help your child as needed to put on their shoes rather than doing it for them. It may take longer for them to do the skill on their own, but it teaches them the steps they need to be more independent. Academic skills also can be integrated into a daily routine. Have children help with any math related problems and involve them in reading. For example, if you have a family picnic and 4 cousins, 3 aunts, 3 uncles, and 2 grandparents will be there, have your child help you count the number of cupcakes you need to bring. If you are baking the cupcakes, work on literacy skills by having your child read the recipe to you. Counting and fractions can be developed by gathering and measuring the ingredients. Children can work on motor skills by cutting butter, stirring ingredients, and pouring the batter into the tin. For children who need direct instruction, schedule a time during the day specifically to work on skills.

3. Build on Existing Skills - When children master a skill continue to review it, but also expand on skills. For example, if your child is mastering their current list of sight words, be sure to add additional words and phrases to their skill set. If they are able to count all the spoons the family has when helping to empty the dishwasher, add a serving spoon or two and teach them to count a little higher. Build on skills one step at a time so they are successful, enjoy learning, and do not become frustrated.

4. Appreciate Small Steps – It can be very frustrating for parents and professionals when children learn slowly or take a step backwards. Try to remember some skills take awhile for children to acquire. Sometimes children need additional examples of the skill or a new approach for instruction. Recognize that children become frustrated as well and teach them to be persistent and patient.

5. Realize It Is Summer – When children have different educational programs, therapies, and activities, it can be easy to forget summer break is also for relaxing. Although working on skills is important, be sure to enjoy the fun things summer has to offer. Enroll kids in swimming lessons, summer camp, tennis class, or just let them play outside. These kinds of activities are a way to stay healthy, learn new skills, and make new friends.

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