



ENGAGING TWEENS AND TEENS IN SUMMER LEARNING: TIPS FOR PARENTS AND PROGRAMS

It's important for all children and young people to keep learning in summer. Middle school is a vulnerable time for all youth as they transition to new grades, new schools, new expectations, and new social environments. Summer can be a great time to ease the transition, but tweens and teens may push back – and they may have their own ideas of how they want to spend their summers. Here are some ideas to keep your tween or teen interested in learning during the summer.

Look for summer learning programs in your community that:

- Set high standards
- Are intellectually challenging and relevant
- Promote a “Culture of Success” with incentives or rewards to make learning fun
- Demonstrate respect, fun, and enthusiasm
- Incorporate college or career preparedness

What parents can do with their tweens and teens to keep them learning in the summer:

Use your child's teacher as a resource. Take advantage of parent-teacher conferences to get information about what your child could use this summer to get ready for the next grade – and about what subjects seem to excite your child in class. Ask the teacher for creative ideas to practice these skills during summer, and use the ideas for trips, outings, and even the ways you think about everyday errands and activities.

Summer reading. Ask if the teacher has a summer reading list or ideas for summer reading that are appropriate and interesting for your child's reading level. Ask the school librarian, too.

Load up at the library. Make sure tweens and teens have plenty of opportunities to read in the summer. Tweens and teens are old enough to choose their own books. Explore the idea of reading a book alongside your child and having regular “book club” discussions in a fun, relaxed setting. Your child will benefit from discussing books with you.

Involve your tween or teen in summer planning. Involving your child serves a few purposes:

- o Increases buy-in and the feeling of choice*
- o Teaches project management skills*
- o Teaches technology skills*

Make it active. Don't forget to keep your child active in the summer. Research shows that children gain body mass index two to three times faster during the summer than the school year and without attending a structured summer program, they are often less active during summer. Regular family tennis matches or swimming outings are a great idea.

Get outside. Summer is the perfect time to take advantage of outdoor resources in your community, and there are plenty of learning opportunities if you know where to find them. The Children and Nature Network, at <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>, allows you to tap into nature options in your area.

Give young people voice and choice. As they become more independent, tweens and teens want more choices and input into how they spend their time. Tap into your child's interests and ask them to make the case to you about a particular project they would like to do as a family or on their own. A budding artist can make a graphic argument; an aspiring lawyer can hold a debate or mock trial; a writer can write out a narrative or even a fictional story that expresses his vision for the project.

Plan a family project. Does your child want to give his or her room a new look? Have them sketch out design ideas, plan a budget, calculate the area needed for paint, price materials, and manage a timeline.

Make it social. Many tweens and teens want to spend free time with their friends. Collaborate with the parents of your child's friends and plan a group project or a series of activities that will involve reading, exposure to natural resources, outdoor science or mathematics through shopping, cooking, or selling.

Sneak learning into vacation planning. Have tweens and teens take a more active role in vacation planning. Let them in on your budget, and ask them to research ways to meet the budget by cutting vacation costs (cheaper transportation, fewer activities, packing your own food) or raising money (family lemonade stand or yard sale).

Create your own rewards system. Think creatively about incentives for your tween or teen to read, practice algebra on a fun website, reach a new skill level in a physical activity, or participate in planning projects. One idea is to create "Dad" or "Mom" bucks to complete "learning challenges." The bucks can then be spent to purchase privileges or experiences—whether it's a sleepover with a friend, a cookie-baking session, or a trip to the mall.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS ENGAGE OLDER YOUTH IN SUMMER LEARNING AT SUMMERBESTPRACTICES.ORG, A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION FUNDED BY THE NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION.