



Summer Learning: Have a Blast, Together!

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As many students with and without learning challenges can take a step back in terms of key reading, writing, and math skills over the summer, our newsletter two years ago included ideas for staying academically sharp over the summer. This year, we have brought back some of those workbook-free ideas—and thrown in a few new ones specifically centered on developing executive function (EF).

Event Planning: Students of all ages need opportunities to develop EF, such as planning. Let your child plan a simple outing, and help him to think about the budget, people involved, timing, and transportation.

Design! In addition to planning, organization of ideas, concepts, and tangible items is a key EF skill. Help your child to redesign her room. Encourage her to think about what she likes. Is there anything she no longer needs and would like to donate? What about overall layout; would moving furniture make her room better? Work with her to develop a small budget for new items or decor.

Board Games: Many games out there can help bolster EF. The card game SET, for example, can help students with cognitive flexibility. Mastermind requires planning, predicting, and cognitive flexibility. Monopoly, Clue, and chess are also great opportunities for fun, challenge, and an EF workout.

Let's Cook. Not only is cooking a creative and hands-on activity, it also requires many academic skills. Researching recipes requires organization, word reading, and reading comprehension. Depending on your child's age, he may want to do an internet search, thumb through a cook book, or choose from a list of recipes you have pre-selected. Together, make a shopping list and pull together all those pots and pans. When it is time to stir, mix, knead, and blend, your child can work on his math skills. Think fractions!



Dear Journal: Many teachers encourage their students to keep a journal over the summer. This open-ended activity is an opportunity to reflect and to fine tune written expression skills. Students who struggle with writing can be understandably reluctant to face that blank journal page, so make journaling less open-ended by providing specific questions or prompts. Allow your child to dictate her thoughts using dictation software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking by Nuance. Get out the scissors, glue, and old magazines and make a collage of words of the day.

Quick Tip: Summer can be a great time to practice using new assistive technology in a pressure-free manner with topics/activities of your child's choosing.

Sneak Preview: Students with learning differences often benefit from a preview of material before more sophisticated learning takes place. Check with next year's teacher or your child's school website to see if the book list for next year is out. Consider watching the movie version and/or reading a book summary, which can provide an organizational framework of the novel. Moreover, your child may feel a boost of confidence when the material is covered in class ("I remember this!"). The same concept is true for textbooks. Documentaries are an excellent means for introducing history and science material in a different, sometimes more meaningful, format.

Sit back and listen. Audio books and/or text-to-speech software are great ways to absorb a good story or nonfiction material. In fact, listening to text and following along can help boost reading accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency.