



Keeping Kids Off the Summer Slide

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Topics: [Summer Reading and Learning](#)

Something is waiting for many children this summer, and their parents don't even know it's out there. It's called "summer slide," and it describes what happens when young minds sit idle for three months.

As parents approach the summer break, many are thinking about the family vacation, trips to the pool, how to keep children engaged in activities at home, the abrupt changes to everyone's schedule - and how to juggle it all. What they might not be focusing on is how much educational ground their children could lose during the three-month break from school, particularly when it comes to reading. Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the nation's oldest and largest children's literacy organization, believes there is no better time than this summer to begin helping our children bridge the gap in learning between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next one. "Motivating children to read throughout the year is essential to building lifelong readers," says Carol H. Rasco, president and CEO of RIF. "And reading is the doorway to all other learning."

Experts agree that children who read during the summer gain reading skills, while those who do not often slide backward. According to the authors of a November 2002 report from [Johns Hopkins Center for Summer Learning](#) "A conservative estimate of lost instructional time is approximately two months or roughly 22 percent of the school year.... It's common for teachers to spend at least a month re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer. That month of re-teaching eliminates a month that could have been spent on teaching new information and skills." Furthermore, they note that family income plays a significant role in determining the magnitude of this summer slide. Students from low-income families "...experience an average summer learning loss in reading achievement of over two months."

Not only do these students suffer greater sliding during the summer, they also experience cumulative effects of greater learning loss each summer. Sociologists Karl Alexander and Doris Entwisle have shown that the cumulative effect of summer learning differences is a primary cause of widening achievement gaps between students of lower and higher socioeconomic levels. Research demonstrates that while student achievement for both middle and lower-income students improves at similar rates during the school year, low-income students experience cumulative summer learning losses throughout their elementary school years.

Summer slide affects millions of children each year in this country-but it doesn't have to. To help prevent children from losing ground to summer slide, RIF has compiled a variety of activities that parents, caregivers, and members of community organizations can use to keep learning fun throughout the summer break.

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Summer Reading: Keeping Kids Interested in Books

Many schools send kids off for summer vacation with a recommended reading list. But even the most avid reader can be easily lured away from books by the call of lazy summer afternoons or playing with friends outside.

To keep your child interested in books -- an especially important activity when school is out and a kid's brain cells will probably be utilized a little too much on things like how to unlock great characters and vehicles in the Mario Kart Wii game -- get your child hooked on some stories now.

In our house, suspenseful series such as Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *The Secret Benedict Society* and *Harry Potter* have been great hits. My 8-year-old and I take turns reading. He loves it when I snuggle with him and read to him but he also loves to read the books by himself when I'm making dinner.

So find something you and your child can both get into together this summer. And if you have to pry the books out of your grade-schooler's hands and tell him to play outside once in a while, you'll know that you've done your job!

By Katherine Lee, About.com Guide to Child Parenting



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