

Maine PIRC Fact Sheet #7

The Summer Slide

The Summer Slide is not a new attraction at the water park; it's a term to describe the slip in children's academic skills over the summer months. Teachers can tell you what research has shown: students tend to forget some of what they have learned in school over the weeks of summer vacation. The good news? Studies also show that parents can help their kids keep this slide to a minimum by engaging them in summertime activities that promote learning.

Summer vacation is a great time to develop broad thinking skills. Instead of focusing on specific subject areas, (which sounds daunting to parents and too much like schoolwork to kids), parents can use summer as a time to focus on developing learning habits and skills that will benefit kids across all subject areas.

In Maine, every school uses the Learning Results as standards, or guidelines, when planning what to teach in the classroom. These standards outline what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. The Learning Results also include a list of six *Guiding Principles*: global skills that all kids need to develop in order to become successful adults. The Guiding Principles can provide a great framework for parents to keep in mind as they plan for brain-boosting summertime fun. Here are the principles, along with some ways to use them to plan activities.

Each student in Maine is expected to become

1a Clear and Effective Communicator.

Communication takes many forms. By the end of their school years, children are expected to be able to use oral, written, visual, artistic, and technological methods of expression. Activities to boost communication skills can look like plain old fun: talking with friends and family, practicing typing and internet skills, using a photo or video camera, writing letters or emails, drawing and painting, and even dancing. Reading for pleasure also encourages language development and reading on the beach counts! Listening to audio tapes and reading favorites out loud promotes listening skills and can spark conversation. Find out what kids like to read, and remember that ANY reading- including magazines, newspapers, manuals, and comic books- is valuable.

2a Self Directed and Life-Long Learner.

Encourage questions, and let your child's curiosity take the lead as you plan activities. Our family knows more about owls than we ever imagined, thanks to my son's interest in the nocturnal birds. We read library books, went to the rescued wildlife park, and even found a traveling presentation with live owls (that we attended three times over the years). AND, we enjoyed some great family time that didn't feel at all like work. What sparks your child's

interest? Encourage kids to ask questions, and to follow through on getting the answers. Teach them where to go for information: the library, Internet, exhibits, presentations, local experts...and use their interests to find opportunities for family fun.

3a Creative and Practical Problem Solver.

Where will we go on vacation? How much television or computer time is reasonable? Whose turn is it to wash the dishes? Everyday family life is full of opportunities to problem-solve. Engaging kids in planning family activities, schedules, and routines can help develop these skills. Those inevitable family conflicts can also become learning opportunities when parents take the role of mediator, rather than director. Encourage kids to brainstorm their own solutions and develop agreements.

A little boredom can also go a long way toward developing creativity. Research shows that creative thinking grows naturally during unstructured time. Summer vacation is a great opportunity to allow kids some time to make their own fun. Kids can also develop creative problem solving skills during more structured activities like camping or going to the beach: Where will the sand castle be safe from the tide?

What can we use to pound the tent stakes? Encourage your child to talk about their thought process. How did you come up with this idea or solution?

4a Responsible and Involved Citizen.

During the school year, kids spend the majority of their time with their same-age peers. You can use summer break to “mix it up” and expose your kids to folks of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Look in your own backyard for opportunities to engage kids in service-related activities. Does an older neighbor need help around the yard? Does a friend’s pet need to be walked or fed? Many organizations hold activity-based fundraisers like walk-a-thons and bike races during the summer months. Community service promotes a sense of pride and a connection to others, and doesn’t need to be big. Simple acts of kindness can keep kids connected to their neighbors.

5a Collaborative and Quality Worker.

This skill can be developed through many of the community activities listed above. Household projects and chores for the family also develop good work habits. Do your children have regular chores? Do they help with occasional bigger household jobs like yard cleanup and window washing? Many families base weekly allowance on completed chores. Here’s an activity that parents can appreciate: enlist everyone’s help to get the weekly cleaning done. Tasks should be delegated with developmental appropriateness in mind. Older children can help younger siblings to do the job right. Scheduling a fun activity like a trip to the beach or

the ballgame when the chores are done can be a great motivator for everyone to pitch in, and to get things done quickly.

6an Integrative and Informed Thinker.

This skill simply means pulling it all together. Can your child make generalizations across topics? Do you and your family talk regularly and express your points of view? You can promote family communication by talking about your child's (and your own) activities and experiences. Some families do this during meals. You can also use current events, news, television and movies to spark conversations. Ask your child's opinionsome thoughts may surprise you.

Summer vacation is a great time for families to play and have fun while practicing important skills. Helping kids get excited about learning can lead to summertime "lessons" that will stick with them when they return to school. When kids realize that learning happens every day, all the time, and not just within the school walls, it helps them to become better students and life-long learners.

To read Maine's Learning Results and the Guiding Principles in full, go to:
<http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/homepage.htm>

Just some of the related resources in Maine Parent Federation's Library:
(Call 1-800-870-7746 to receive materials)

How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk, Faber & Mazlish
Cool Communication, Henkhart & Henkhart
Positive Discipline and *Positive Discipline for Teens*, Nelsen & Lott
What Kids Need to Succeed, Benson
A Mind at a Time, Levine
Raising a Thinking Child, Shure
You're Smarter Than You Think, Armstrong
Raising Respectful Kids in a Rude World, McKay, Eckstein & Maybell
365 Outdoor Activities You Can Do With Your Child, Bennett

For more ideas on specific summertime activities, try these Internet resources:

www.kidsource.com/education/calendar.summer.activities.html

www.summerlearning.org/activities

Maine PIRC (Parent Information and Resource Center)
PO Box 2067 Augusta, ME 04338
1-800-870-7746 or (207) 623-2144
Website: www.mpf.org Email: parentconnect@mpf.org
