

## Take a Timeout to Create a Happier Family

### Kindness, consideration and calm, coming right up!

There are many important lessons we must teach our children, but the most critical ones really are the simplest to grasp: Be nice. Pay attention. Think things through.

Being thoughtful and aware – what some experts call “mindfulness” – can help you create a more harmonious family life, and model the type of behavior you want your children to mimic.

Performing random acts of kindnesses for strangers or for people we know holds untold value for both givers and receivers. Investing time to demonstrate caring, consideration and concern for one another can inspire children to behave similarly in their own interactions. Get started by teaching your kids to:

**Sharpen focus.** Children notice everything, but young minds tend to wander. Encouraging (not nagging!) them to pay attention can be as simple as a 20-minute walk. Moving the body can help focus the mind, explains Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder and More Compassionate*, and presents the perfect opportunity for kids to take greater notice of things around them.

You can also help strengthen your children's level of attentiveness, she says, with this easy exercise: Have your family sit in a circle and pass a plastic cup filled two-thirds with water from one member to the next. The goal is to focus on the sounds the water makes as it's being passed around, alerting each person to its arrival. After a few rounds, the exercise is repeated, but this time everyone's eyes are closed. Again, having your children listen intently to the sounds of the water serves to strengthen their attention skills. Putting that same effort into practice in other areas, whether it's doing chores or homework, can help keep kids on track.



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**Create calm.** How can kids stay cool and composed when they feel themselves getting stressed out? By taking a timeout to stop and reassess their situation – and all that takes is a few deep breaths. Teach your child to count from 1 to 10 when faced with a challenging situation, and to try to make the connection between their actions and what they're thinking and feeling. That, says Greenland, can positively shift their behavior.

**Cultivate goodwill.** To help children become more thoughtful of others, keep your actions simple and fun, advises Greenland. Her

strategy: Play a game with your family of sending friendly wishes (either verbal, email or text), first to each other, then to friends, then to others beyond your immediate worlds. Helping your kids gain awareness of what might make others feel good, such as wishing someone to be happy and healthy, opens their minds and hearts. And as they mature and enjoy more life experiences, notes Greenland, your children will connect and respond to others in a more conscious and compassionate way.

Written by Beryl Meyer



# Keep Kids Learning All Summer Long

## They won't even know it's happening!

Homework and tests. Extra-credit projects and after-school activities. Everyone knows how hectic the academic year can be, so it's no surprise that kids – and parents! – just want to kick back and relax once summer arrives. But that doesn't mean children should take a hiatus from learning.

According to the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), it's more important now than ever to provide kids with learning opportunities throughout the year, to avoid what experts call the "summer slide," a loss of about two months' worth of math, vocabulary and reading skills. Even worse, slide effects can be cumulative, meaning that, by the time they reach middle and high school, that summertime loss could negatively impact your child's success at school – and at life – permanently.

"The good news is that kids learn in many different ways," says Katie Hart, Ph.D., program director of Summer Reading Explorers, a Children's Trust-funded program created as part of the Read to Learn initiative. "Keep learning hands-on, interactive, high quality and fun, and your children will not only avoid the slide, they'll be even better prepared to tackle new things once school's back in session."

These 10 easy tips will get you started:

**1. Bring out the board games.** Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders can help your children further develop their counting skills. Monopoly is a great way to teach kids about money. Even a simple game of dice can boost your children's brainpower, as it's a fun way to make up subtraction, addition, multiplication and division problems.

**2. Boost their "street" smarts.** Purchase sidewalk chalk at a dollar store or a big box, low-cost retailer, then encourage your kids to spell out words on the sidewalk, a driveway or a back porch. Don't worry about the mess; it'll wash away with the next summer rain.

**3. Make reading magic.** "Place engaging books in your children's hands," says David Reitman, Ph.D., co-director of Project RISE (Research, Inspiration, Support, Evaluation), a quality improvement effort funded by The Children's Trust to, in part, promote academic success. "It's one of the most important things you can do to avoid summer slide." A trip to the library will keep your kids' reading shelf stocked and their imaginations stoked.

**4. Play the market.** Before heading to the grocery store, have your child create



a shopping list by writing down the items you dictate. At the store, read food labels together, and ask them to add the prices of the items you're purchasing. See if they can figure out how much you'll owe the cashier at the end of the visit. Teach older children about percentages by computing sales tax.


**5. Invite kids into the kitchen.** Children can brush up on reading skills and learn the importance of following directions by reading recipes. "Sneak in a math lesson by teaching kids how to use measuring cups and spoons, and asking them to halve or double a recipe's ingredients," says Hart.

**6. Use drive time wisely.** Running errands with the kids in the car? "Ask them to count all the traffic lights or yellow cars they see, or have them identify all the letters of the alphabet they recognize on signs and billboards," suggests Reitman.

**7. Explore the world around you.** "Science is really all about asking questions," says Hart, "you don't have to do an actual experiment to help kids build their skills." So have some ice cream together and talk about how it changes from a solid to a liquid. At the beach or the park, take pictures of anything that catches your kids' eyes, say, a jellyfish or a bird, and look it up together online.

**8. Make learning stick.** Pick up a roll of magnetic tape, cut the tape into smaller pieces and apply words written on paper to the sticky side of the magnet. Kids will have fun moving around their magnetic vocabulary words on cookie sheets or on your fridge to create sentences.

**9. Share your stories.** "There is so much power in simply talking with your children," says Hart. "Share stories together and spend time pointing out and talking about things in the world around them – by doing this you are helping to develop your child's vocabulary, which can help boost their reading comprehension."

**10. Play catch up.** "If you know your child is already behind or struggling in school, use the summer to make up for lost ground with a structured learning environment," says Reitman, such as a free program at the library or one that's funded by The Children's Trust. 

*Written by Chrissie Ferguson*

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# Banish Boredom!

These get-'em-off-the-couch activities are equal parts high energy and fun, so your kids will stay interested – and involved.

## Take a hike.

Whether it's in your neighborhood or a nearby park or beach, a walk works the muscles of kids' minds and bodies when they're on a quest to spot hidden wonders. Draw a map of the desired (and safe) area and attach pictures of kid-friendly objects (for example, worms, a bird's nest, seashells, etc.) with boxes to be checked off upon sighting. Add to the spirit of the adventure by providing your explorers with hats or bandanas, "walking sticks" (such as a broomstick handle), and water bottles and empty jars (with holes punched in the lids) for any specimens they'll want to bring home.



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**Build an obstacle course.** Lay blankets on the floor, place a number of chairs in a row, add a jump rope and a hula hoop and you've got the makings of a "boot camp" for your kids! Plan out age-appropriate workout challenges for them (from crawling under the chairs and doing pushups on the blankets to skipping rope and hula'ing), with a "prize" (such as an extra half hour of TV watching or an extended bedtime) awarded to the winner of the competition.

**Play a game of "spikeball."** Hitting something in mid-air helps strengthen hand-eye coordination, plus, kids just love the sound it makes. To ensure safety, substitute a balloon for a ball and let kids bat it back and forth (they can also use cardboard paddles you cut out yourself). If children are playing outside, water balloons or ice cubes thrown against the pavement also deliver a satisfying *thwack!*

**Transform kids into rock 'em, sock 'em robots.** Beam your kids up for an afternoon of out-of-this-world fun! Wrapped with aluminum foil, empty tissue or cereal boxes make great "robot boots," while empty paper towel rolls turn into light sabers that kids can safely use to "fight" extraterrestrials and save the planet.

**Propose a DIY room makeover.** Give kids leeway to rearrange their room or update it for a new look, using only their imagination. Moving the bed to a different spot (with your help, of course), painting a pretty mural or showcasing their favorite things in a new way allows your child to envision options – a plus for growing minds.

**Encourage builders of all ages.** Invite kids to let their imagination take shape with a variety of household "tools," including straws, ice cream sticks, clothespins, paper cups and glue. Whether building a single tower or an entire city (or designing a customized spaceship!), children cultivate not only their creativity and collaborative spirit, but also their fine motor skills.

*Written by Beryl Meyer*



# News You Need Now: Childhood Diabetes

## Protect your kids while still satisfying their sweet tooth

For many kids, the chime of an ice cream truck is music to their ears. After all, what better way to cool down on a hot summer day than with a frosty treat? Trouble is, too many ice cream cones are just one of many contributing factors to childhood obesity and juvenile diabetes – a disease that's on the rise, with its greatest impact being felt in minority groups.

**"Good" sugar versus "bad."** Sugar, a carbohydrate, comes in different forms. Naturally occurring simple sugars (also known as fructose and glucose) are found in fruits, nuts, vegetables, dairy products and honey, and are bound with energy-providing nutrients and fiber which helps slow the absorption of sugar and regulate its impact on the body's blood sugar levels. Complex sugars – processed or refined additives such as table sugar (sucrose) and high fructose corn syrup found in sodas – lack nutritional

value and deliver empty calories that trigger sugar highs and hunger.

**The hidden truth.** More often than not, it's the added sugar in foods that's turning today's kids into sugar addicts, and parents into unsuspecting enablers. That's because food manufacturers who add sugar to packaged foods commonly use unrecognizable names on nutritional labels. According to a report from the University of California, San Francisco, 61 aliases for sugar are currently being used by the food industry.

**How much is too much?** For children ages 2-18, the American Heart Association recommends no more than 6 teaspoons (or 24 grams) of sugar a day. But here's where hidden sugars can sabotage even the best-intentioned parents. One packet of ketchup for your child's hamburger contains 2 grams of sugar; an 8 oz. juice box contains a whopping 26! And that ice cream cone

mentioned earlier? Just one scoop of vanilla ice cream – minus the cone – has 14 grams of sugar, more than half a day's limit.

**The risk of diabetes is real.** In an interview published by Stanford Medicine, Thomas Robinson, M.D., a pediatric obesity researcher and a professor of pediatrics at the Stanford School of Medicine, says, "the increasing rate of Type 2 diabetes at younger and younger ages probably reflects obesity, plus lots of different changes, including changes in our diets such as more sugars and processed foods, and less physical activity." More concerning, he adds, "the Centers for Disease Control now projects that 1 in 3 U.S. children will have diabetes in their lifetimes, and it will be 1 in 2 among African-American and Latina girls." The good news: You can reduce the risk by helping your child to become more active and avoid gaining excess weight, and by eliminating sugar from their diet whenever possible.

**Trick their taste buds.** Citing a study funded by the National Institutes of Health and published in the research journal *Obesity*, Robert H. Lustig, M.D., pediatric endocrinologist and author of *Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity and Disease*, notes that "we can turn a child's metabolic health around in 10 days without changing calories and without changing weight – just by taking the added sugars out of their diet."

Kelly Pritchett, Ph.D., RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, recommends using fruits and vegetables that are naturally sweet when baking or cooking, such as bananas, sweet potatoes and apples. "I also reduce the amount of sugar I use in recipes," says Pritchett. "Watch out for added sugars in things like granola bars by making your own at home. Opt for plain yogurt sweetened with frozen fruit or a drizzle of honey." And instead of sugar-laden soft drinks, tempt kids to try sparkling water infused with juicy berries or tangy lemon. The more creative you are, the easier the switch to healthful eating will be! 🌱

Written by Beryl Meyer

### Do you have parenting questions?

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