



Wee Learners(4 - 5 years): Strategies for a Successful Summer Break

While your average child may be thrilled by the end of the school year, anticipating lazy days and sleeping in, the prospect of summer break isn't quite that unalloyed pleasure for parents, and if you have a child with emotional or developmental issues, nothing calls on whatever extra powers you might possess more than the long break that lies ahead. Here are some tips to help keep your child on track so summer can be as rewarding as possible for everyone in the family:

Maintain your schedule: While you may never be able to duplicate the structure school provides, it helps to maintain the school year's daily schedule, right down to meal times and bedtime, as much as possible.

Make it visual: Kids who thrive on predictability and are prone to panic over transitions, benefit from posted schedules that outline what will happen throughout the day. Depending on your child's developmental level, simple pictures can also help.

Make plans: Try to schedule as many activities as possible, as early as possible, and keep your kids posted. This can mean anything from "we're going to Aunt Mary's Thursday at 5pm for dinner" to having a set routine that every day, weather permitting, you'll be going to the playground or pool. Even one such activity can give kids a center of gravity, so to speak, around which the rest of the day can be structured.

Get outdoors: Home can become a safe cocoon, but no child should spend hours in front of a screen. Even if camp isn't in the cards, try to find something your child enjoys—riding a bike or scooter, playing tag, or splashing at the community pool, water park, or beach—and do it. Physical activity is good for everyone's mind, body and spirit, especially those kids with energy to burn.

Maintain—or create—a behavioral system: Children may act like they want to be in charge, but the truth is they feel safer knowing exactly what you expect of them and the rewards that result from good behavior. This is never truer than during the seemingly boundless—and boundary-free—summer break. You should choose the two or three most desired positive behaviors to nurture with consistent and positive reinforcement and try to ignore as many of the negative ones as possible. This teaches kids the definite rewards of desired behavior, and that acting out gets them nothing—not even negative attention. Remember: if you have limits, such as 30 minutes a day of earned computer time, you should stick to them.

Find support: Parents of kids with developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems often feel isolated and lonely. It can be difficult watching all the other neighborhood children set off for a camp yours can't attend. Don't feel bad booking a sitter or asking family members to babysit so that you can spend time with friends; it'll help you keep from feeling marooned, and your well-being is critical to caring for your child.

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