Keep Learning Alive For Your Child Over the Winter Break

Your child looks at the calendar and imagines the joy of having no schedule for the whole winter school holiday. You look at the same blank squares on your calendar and have a mild moment of panic.

Here are some activities that will keep your child learning—and keep you from hearing, “I’m bored” during the holiday:

**Let your child discover** the past by talking with grandparents, aunts, uncles—even you. Help your child plan questions to ask, such as, “What was school like for you?” He can record the conversations, write them down, or just listen.

**Assemble a list** from your local newspaper of places to go and things to do. Every community has places that will interest kids. Check out a local museum (see if they have a day when admission is free). Look for free concerts you can attend. See if the local public library has any special story hours or performances.

**Select a movie** based on a book. After you and your child finish reading the book, watch the movie. Discuss how the two were alike and how they were different.

**Prepare food together.** Nearly every culture has some special foods associated with the holiday season. With your child, prepare foods you remember from your childhood. Share your memories. Or do some research and prepare a dish you’ve never tried.

**Word Games Strengthen Writing Skills**

Using proper grammar takes practice. If your child struggles with forming and punctuating sentences, turn writing into a game. Here are two fun ones to try:

**Fill-in-the-blank game.** Review the different parts of speech and write a story with missing words. For example: “The girl stepped on a ____ (noun).” Take turns filling in the blanks. You can help by saying things like, “A noun is a person, place or thing. I’ll choose the word pie!” Make the words as silly as you’d like. Then read the story aloud.

**Punctuation game.** Write a short story without punctuation. Then read it together. It’s tough! This shows the importance of punctuation. Now edit the story, adding punctuation that makes it easy (or fun) to read. Suggest that your child write a story for you to punctuate. Discuss why you chose—or didn’t choose—certain punctuation marks.

*“The more you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you will go.”*

—Dr. Seuss
Are You Helping Your Dawdler Speed Things Up?

It’s time to leave, but your child is not ready. This is the fourth morning this week you’ve been late. Some kids just seem to have only one speed—slow. But there are ways parents can help these kids learn to “get a move on.”

Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out if you are doing all you can to move your dawdling child out the door:

1. Do you make sure your child goes to bed on time, so it’s easier to get up in the morning?
2. Do you take time at night to lay out clothes and pack book bags?
3. Does your child know, step by step, what she has to do to get ready in the morning?
4. Do you give your child “two-minute warnings” to ease transitions?
5. Do you build extra time into your schedule?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your dawdling child get up to speed. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Make Online Safety a Priority for Every Member of Your Family

Kids use computers for homework, fun and socializing, but the convenience has a cost. The digital world can be dangerous, so parents must promote computer and Internet safety. Experts recommend that you:

Keep the computer in a central spot, such as in the family room, where you can monitor activities.

Go online together. Let your children show you their computer skills and favorite sites. Guide them to child-friendly resources.

Keep track of your children’s online activities. With whom do they email or chat? What games do they play? What sites do they use? Keep online accounts in your name.

Consider installing programs that make computer use safer for kids. Also check your Internet service provider’s safety features.

Learn about Internet safety. Then talk with your children about basic rules and post them near the computer. You can find a list of rules at www.netsmartz.org/resources/pledge.htm.

Tell your children not to share personal information online, such as their name, age, address or school. They should never agree to meet online-only “friends” or acquaintances in person.

Do not respond to inappropriate messages. If your children receive one, they should tell a trusted adult immediately.

Remember that your children may go online in other locations, such as at a friend’s home. Take steps to ensure safety no matter where they use the Internet.

Talk about the consequences of lying. Let your children know that lying destroys trust. If they make a habit of lying to people, they won’t be able to believe what they say—even when they are telling the truth!

Be a role model. Children are good “lie detectors.” They notice when parents tell the truth—and when they don’t

Create opportunities for telling the truth. Say, “You broke my vase,” instead of, “Did you do this?” It’s better to say what happened rather than to ask unnecessary questions.

React calmly. When your children lie, don’t label them a “liar.” Express confidence that they will make better choices in the future.

Reward trustworthiness. If your children are truthful in a difficult situation, compliment them!

Admit your mistakes. We all make mistakes. If your children catch you being dishonest, admit you’re wrong.

Show Your Children That Honesty is Best Policy

Research shows that by the time children reach elementary school, most know the difference between being honest and lying. But that doesn’t make telling the truth easy! To encourage honesty in your children:

Talk about it. Ask your children if they believe that honesty is the best policy. Why or why not? Do they want others to tell them the truth? When do they think it’s okay to lie?