

1680 Hours of Parental Supervision this Summer

During the months of June, July, and August, the time when schools are closed, school-age children will have many hours to play, sleep, learn, and grow. This period is called the summer vacation. How well would these hours be used? Most schools close for about ten weeks. Based on ten weeks of vacation, I calculated there will be 1680 hours available to students during the summer vacation.

Parents, how wisely will your children use their 1680 hours this summer? Truthfully the management of the time should be the responsibility of the parents and not the children. Often that is not the case. Here is an overview of how some families would utilize the 1680 hours: 683 hours for sleeping, 105 hours for eating, 35 hours for religious activities, 200 hours for watching television, 5 hours for reading, 100 hours for academic work, 280 hours for recreation and fun. If children have a summer job, they will spend about 300 hours working.

If all families were using the hours as stated above for each activity, it might not be too bad a summer vacation. However, those hours do not reflect the reality in at least 75% of homes during the summer vacation. Sadly, the 1680 hours for summer activities will be divided this way: First, the sleep time will be reduced from 683 to 350 hours. Unfortunately, during the summer vacation when students should be having more rest, they are actually sleeping very little. The television viewing time increases from 200 hours to at least 650 hours. Online/telephone social media usage jumps to about 650 hours or more. In many cases, social media interaction happens simultaneously with television viewing. If students do not have a summer job, they become couch potatoes and remain in front of the television for most of their waking hours. The waking hours may continue into the early hours of the morning. The number of hours spent in reading and studying during the summer decreases from 100 hours to zero hour.

Far too many students, and even some parents, feel that summer vacation is the time to do whatever they want to do and how long they want to do it. There is very little structure and accountability. Intentional planning is needed during summer vacation time just like it is during the school year. During summer vacation, children who have a summer job, or spend time learning new skills each week, will be better students during the school year. Yes, they can have more time for fun and recreation. But there should be a balanced, structured time for fun, learning, and rest.

Learning must never stop. I am in no way saying that children cannot have lots of fun during the summer break. I am saying that along with fun there can still be learning, and lots of it. I believe that when learning is fun it is retained longer and better understood. This is what summer camps are all about. That is what sport camps such as basketball, tennis, softball, boxing are all about—developing the mind and the body. Learning new fun skills like skydiving, swimming, diving, snorkeling, fishing, sailing, baking, biking, computer coding, gardening, etc., can all expand the mind and the muscles. The point is that the parents are to ensure that learning never ends, and certainly not for almost the three long summer months.

For far too many children, summer time results in a brain drain that leaves children intellectually crippled. Educator Grace Chen's article, "Prevent Brain Drain: Keep Your Kids' Minds Sharp During Vacation" states: "Over the course of summer vacation, students lose between 2 to 2 ½ months of math skills from the previous year's learning. This loss of computational understanding is experienced by children regardless of their background or family income. Some students also experience significant setbacks in reading ability as well. Students with a low socioeconomic status can lose up to three months of reading skills in just 2-3 months of summer break. These deficits also appear during the shorter winter and spring vacations, although not in nearly as robust a fashion." Parents are to do their best to keep their child's brain active all year round. Children do not have to be in formal math classes to keep learning about math. This can occur through fun assignments given by the parents. It might be calculating the amount of sugar to put in a cake. It might be measuring the length of lumber to build a dog house.

How can you help your children retain during the summer vacation more of what they have learned during the school year? I recommend that your children watch no more than 200 hours of television between now and the day school opens for the new school year. That's about three hours a day. Also try to have a television black-out day during each week or for a full week at least once during the summer vacation. Make sure your children sleep at least 560 hours (8 hours a day) and not 280 (4 hours a day). This is not good for mental, physical and emotional health. Here are more recommendations for the summer vacation:

1. Ensure your children read at least two hours for every hour they spend watching television. Make sure it is an interesting book of their choosing.
2. Organize local cultural tours of Nassau or The Bahamas. Plan to spend about 20 to 40 hours during the summer visiting historical sites, government ministries, art and cultural museums, for example.
3. Find fun toys, games, activities for children to do in the outdoors every day.
4. Make sure, as parents, you spend at least one to two hours each day playing, reading, or working with your children.
5. If the children are old enough, ensure they have at least four hours a day of work on a job or at home.
6. For one hour each week during summer vacation, let your children review something they have learned during the school year.
7. Three weeks before school begins, ensure your children spend about 20 to 30 minutes every other day reading, planning, and studying from books for the new school year.

Parents make a big mistake each year by not providing structure during the summer months. They drop all guards and standards, thinking it is best for their children. This is detrimental to children's welfare. Although the structure can be different during the summer months, the principles are to remain. That is, children should obtain sufficient rest, nutrition, social and intellectual stimulation. Too many children learn negative habits during the summer months that will affect their lives forever. If only they had parents who cared and were wise enough to provide the same standard and structure they did during the school year! Parents, this information in this article is relevant for elementary and secondary school students (ages 5 to 18). No one is exempted.

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