Summer brain boosters

Fill summer break with fun activities that help your youngster remember what she learned during the school year—and lead to even more learning. Playing these roles will keep her skills sharp.

Reading athlete

Suggest that your child “run” a reading marathon and chart her progress on a map. Each hour of reading equals 1 mile. If she reads a chapter book for 30 minutes after lunch and you read her a bedtime story for 15 minutes, that’s 45 minutes, or $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Can she read “26.2 miles”—or more—by the end of the summer?

Math photographer

Your youngster can take photos and find the math in them. Perhaps she’ll snap a shot of a quilt and tell you which shapes she sees. Or she could photograph part of a brick wall and multiply to find the number of bricks in the picture (6 rows of 8 bricks each = 48 bricks).

Backyard scientist

Let your child use science to make outdoor summer activities more fun. She might experiment to create a bubble solution that produces bigger or longer-lasting bubbles. Or maybe she’ll cook s’mores in her very own solar oven.

Note: Make sure she chooses safe experiments, and provide supervision.

Show appreciation for teachers

Did you know that some of the best gifts you and your child can give his teacher don’t cost a thing? Consider these suggestions.

- Send kudos. Have him write a letter telling the teacher what he liked about school this year. He might mention an interesting history lesson or the cozy classroom writer’s den. Then, you could email the principal to let her know what you appreciated about the teacher.

- Collect memories. Gather any photos you took during classroom or school events, and ask other parents to share theirs. Your youngster can compile them into a binder and add captions. (“Our class STEM fair had some creative inventions!”)

Tip: Also use these ideas for specialists like art, music, and PE teachers.
What a smart decision!

Your child is still learning the strategies it takes to make good choices. Teach him to ask himself the following questions when he’s faced with a decision.

What might happen? Have your youngster imagine possible outcomes of a choice. You could ask, “What will happen if you spend your allowance on Legos?” He may say that he wouldn’t have souvenir money for an upcoming trip.

Outside-the-box thinking

Thinking flexibly will help your child do well in school, whether she’s using a vocabulary word in different ways or coming up with a new approach to a math problem. Try these ideas to stretch her thinking.

Tell jokes and riddles

Ask your youngster, “What has four wheels and flies?” She’ll need to consider that “flies” might mean “insects” or “travels fast.” The answer? A garbage truck! Or try, “What has one eye but can’t see?” She should think of non-living things that have an eye, such as a needle or a hurricane. Are there any other possibilities?

Find new uses for objects

Take turns choosing a household object and thinking of different ways to use it. Your child might say a spatula could be a golf club, and you could suggest using it as a flyswatter. What can she do with a game board? Perhaps she’ll unfold it halfway and prop it upside-down—it’s a tunnel for her toy trains.

The give-and-take of conversation

Q: How can I teach my son to carry on a good conversation?

A: Here’s an easy way for your child to remember what makes a good conversation. Encourage him to think of it like Ping-Pong—the ball goes back and forth, and the game wouldn’t work if one player kept the ball on his side of the net.

To help your son practice, bounce a small ball across the table to “serve” a conversation starter. (“On my way to work this morning, I saw a mother deer with her fawns.”) Now he can bounce the ball back and pose a “Ping-Pong question”—one that will keep the conversation going. Example: “Wow, how many fawns were there?”

Go back and forth a few times. Then it’s your child’s turn to serve, and you ask him a question to keep the ball bouncing.