

A guide to summer tutoring

By Jill L. Ferguson

Your child may be counting down the days until summer vacation, but is taking a break from academics completely exactly what he or she needs? Mark J. Griffin, Ph.D. writes on Understood.org, "The long vacation doesn't simply hit the 'pause' button on reading, math and writing skills. It can actually erode these skills. When it comes to certain kinds of knowledge, kids really do have to 'use it or lose it.' This is especially true for kids with learning and attention issues. Summer learning loss can set kids with learning and attention issues back as much as two to three months." Griffin is the Founding Headmaster of Eagle Hill School, a boarding school for children with special learning disabilities in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Griffin says, "A good tutor may be the single best way to maintain and perhaps increase your child's skills over the summer." The tutor can work weekly or every other week with your child on a particular subject area, with assigning readings and work to be done in between face-to-face sessions.

Tutoring can also take place more informally. For example, you and your children could read the same books over the summer and discuss each book on given deadlines. Or you could work on math ratios by cooking or baking together. Or your child could practice writing by keeping a journal to be shared with you and corrected for spelling and grammar by you or you could encourage your child to do creative writing that can be corrected for the same things. Enrolling your child in a volunteer opportunity, such as reading books to people in a senior living facility or working in a library or a lab may help prevent summer brain drain.

How to find a tutor

But if finding a regularly scheduled tutor is more ideal for your child's learning, here are some places you can find tutors:

- Some school districts work with local organizations to pair students up with volunteer tutors. You may also want to ask your child's classroom aide about tutoring. These aides often charge less for tutoring than certified teachers do. Another upside to classroom aides is that they're familiar with the curriculum and with the teachers' expectations. And of course some teachers offering tutoring services during the summer so check with your child's teacher if that seems like a good fit.
- Also, if your child has a specific learning issue, a nonprofit might be able to help with tutoring. For example, Scottish Rite Masons have Children's Dyslexia Centers in Pittsburgh and New Castle that offer accredited tutoring services. The centers provide two years of free one-on-one, multisensory structured language instruction for students who have been formally diagnosed with dyslexia.
- Another place you could find a tutor is by contacting the college or university nearest you and ask if students who are education majors (or done with their bachelors degree and getting teaching credentials) are looking for tutoring opportunities.
- Or, there are plenty of in-person tutoring centers sprinkled throughout the Pittsburgh area that offer formal tutoring relationships in almost every subject.
- And lastly, online tutoring is available for as little as \$5 through a number of for-profit businesses. Do a Google search and then cross reference with online reviews on Yelp and other third party-sites to ensure quality and effectiveness.

Reinforcement of learning is most effective when it is done regularly and consistently, for even a few minutes per day. And with the right framework, tutoring can be not just work but also infused with fun. ■

Jill L. Ferguson is a writer, artist and entrepreneur originally from Pittsburgh.



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