

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Naomi Bartholomew, HEAD OF ST CATHERINE'S PREP SCHOOL, SHARES HER TIPS FOR KEEPING LEARNING FUN OVER THE SUMMER

The long summer break can seem like a daunting prospect for parents of bright, active children. It's important for children to have some down-time and, dare I say, even the opportunity to get bored occasionally, as it's only then that they will learn to be creative and resourceful.

Those starting nursery or school this year will need to be able to share adult attention come September, so having time to occupy themselves is useful preparation. As is the chance to get dressed independently, be confident going to the toilet and washing their hands, be brave with trying a variety of foods, and making choices and seeing them through. Some of these seemingly simpler, smaller activities can really help children develop for the next step.

GET OUTDOORS

Everything from picnics in the garden to building a 'bug hotel' out of sticks and leaves in the park are great activities for young children. Observing nature and collecting leaves and petals can be hours of fun. Creating a shoebox 'museum' of all the objects found can also be a wonderful way for young children to look carefully at small objects. Another activity is to wrap sticky tape around your child's wrist and have them make a 'nature bracelet' out of small and interesting items they find – feathers, leaves and bark work really well. The most important thing is to foster your child's natural curiosity and encourage them to look closely and observe what is in their immediate surroundings.

BE CREATIVE

Another brilliant activity is to raid your recycling bin and allow your child to make things out of items that would otherwise be thrown away. Items can be transformed with paint, used as printing blocks or modelled and built into towers using PVA glue. Allow your child to create for themselves and if they need help, use a picture book to find ideas.

Indoor dens can be created from laundry baskets, old sheets and blankets. Anything which transforms one thing into something



else is fostering creativity and building on imaginative thought.

UNDERTAKE EVERYDAY CHORES

Everything from setting the table, washing up, sorting laundry into light and dark items or cooking tasks such as shelling peas create brilliant learning opportunities. Measuring for baking, or decanting food into jars and containers for storing or freezing are all useful. Patience is needed here, as tasks can take longer than they might otherwise with young helpers but these are all golden opportunities for small amounts of responsibility and learning along the way.

NUMBERS AND BASIC MATHS

Research shows that maths learning takes the greatest step backwards over the summer break, hence it is very important to continue with counting and sorting whenever possible. A number line on the washing line can be helpful for pre-school, and simple sums such as working out change or revising times tables are important for those already at school.

READING

Finally, keep reading fun and ensure that it happens every day. Visit your local library and



Foster their curiosity with outdoor play

read, read, read with and to your child. If they are reading themselves, listen whenever you can and encourage younger ones to hold and look through picture books, talking about what they can see even if they are making up their own story.

There are numerous sources of activity, but keeping things simple and close to home can be a very useful mantra for the long summer break. You do not need to compete with a fully kitted-out nursery or the superb facilities of your child's school. Instead, simple activities at home can be just as fun and fulfilling, and all benefit learning. **US**