

TEN TIPS to ENSURE that STUDENTS' LEARNING STAY STRONG DURING HOLIDAYS

Whether by Zoom, at desks spaced carefully apart, or even in outdoor classrooms, students have been working all year long to learn new information and skills in college. Of course, as adults, we want that hard-earned knowledge to stick around permanently! (And not go the way of, say, students' tendency to "forget" to do a chore you reminded them about eight times.) Here is some helpful insight into how students retain information, and some teacher-approved tricks for making it happen at home.

USE IT or LOSE IT

Let's update this saying to "Use it, correctly, again and again." As anyone who has ever crammed for a test knows, short-term learning does not usually translate into long-term mastery.

Repetition over time strengthens brain connections. This is especially true for children. Finding ways to keep coming back to those multiplication facts, spelling words, or state capitals is essential for children to hang onto that knowledge long after the school bell rings.

Our instinct as adults might be to let children struggle a bit to arrive at correct answers on their own, and in the case of new learning, this can be a valuable method. When going for review and retention of content, however, practicing correctly is key. So rather than having a child try six times to correctly define a vocabulary word or erase again and again until they have got the countries on a map of Africa right, just tell them the correct answer, or show them how to quickly find it. Time spent mulling over "wrong" information can inhibit learning. Neuroscientists call this lingering in an "error state."

CREATE OPTIMAL CONDITIONS

Children can smell homework a mile away, but there are ways to make review pleasant and effective. Movement has been shown to improve learning by kickstarting the brain into a more productive state. Plus, when children review on the move, they often forget they are doing schoolwork.

Using skills in real life contexts is another winning strategy that works particularly well at home. This keeps practice interesting (boring practice = less effective practice) and creates a whole new set of experiences on which children can hang their synaptic connections. The more varied ways a child can practice a skill or use information, the better.

Finally, while excessive stress is a surefire obstacle to learning, a little bit of well-intentioned intensity actually helps get those neurons firing. Turning review into a game or light-hearted competition is a great way to make it fun and effective.

WALK and TALK

What feels boring when competing with playing at home feels entertaining when it's making the steps fly by during a routine task. Recite multiplication tables while walking the dog or review letters and sounds on the way to the shop. (While you lose the movement benefits, this trick also works for vehicle commutes. Children are stuck there anyways and might be grateful for something to pass the time!)

MAKE IT a ROUTINE

Little bits of review add up. Post a sticky note “password” on a frequently used doorway in your home so children have to read a sight word or vocabulary word every time they pass through.

PUT IT on a GAME BOARD

Use sidewalk chalk to add spelling, vocabulary, or sight words, or math facts, to a hopscotch board. Or draw a bull’s eye target on the pavement and put words or numbers in the rings. Children can throw a stone or bounce a ball onto the target.

LEARN in the KITCHEN

The kitchen is a hub for real-life learning. Children can practice reading packaging or write down “orders” from family members. They can use knowledge of fractions to follow a recipe or be in charge of dividing a pan of cupcakes fairly.

LET CHILDREN be the TEACHER

Teaching someone else is a powerhouse learning strategy and children love to feel like capable experts. If teaching family members isn’t motivating enough, lend out your phone for children to make their own teaching videos. They can teach viewers about plants, insects they find, the weather, or whatever else relates to content they learned at school.

MAKE IT a FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Here is where that “just right” amount of stress works in your favour. Set a family challenge to be the first to use a vocabulary word in regular conversation during the day. Or each grab a book and tally how many times you can find a sight word. Compete to see who can create the longest sentence with a set of word cards.

LET LEARNING HELP CHILDREN WHAT THEY WANT

Children are never more motivated than when trying to achieve their own goals. Does your child want to buy a new gadget? Use it as an excuse to practice working with money and make a savings plan. Is your child angling for a later bedtime? Ask them to put those skills they learned in writing class to work and write you a persuasive letter.

USE TECHNOLOGY & the INTERNET

Tutors aren’t just the people who help you conquer subjects during the school year—they can also offer study tips, strategies, and advice for reviewing material during summer, all from an educator’s perspective. These can also be in the form of internet-based programmes to assist with embedding learning for a variety of subjects.

Reviewing school learning can be fun and making sure that all that hard work this school year was absolutely worth it!