

The Last Weeks of School

As I walk around the school building these days, there is the familiar air that can be felt during the last weeks of school. Some children are eagerly awaiting the relaxation of summer. Others are mixed with apprehension and excitement about their upcoming camps. Children are happy to be advancing to the next grade, yet sad to leave their current mix of teachers and friends. Then there are those that are graduating and leaving Seaman behind. We all wish them the best of luck, as saying good-bye is always bittersweet. One main theme I notice in the classrooms that you may also notice at home is that as the temperature is rising, attention spans seem to drop. I came across this article by Cheryl Embrett entitled, “Tips to get Your Kids Through the End of the School Year”. I’d like to share some of her helpful advice about getting through the home stretch. The following is a list of her suggestions:

1. *Stick to routine*

As tempting as it is to slip into summer-relaxed mode, don’t abandon the routines and structures you’ve relied on all year. Now that it’s light outside later, the kids may be clamoring for you to move back bedtime, but they still need to be tucked in at a reasonable hour. I sometimes see parents out shopping with their kids at 9:30 on a school night. They’re relieved that things are winding down and they think it doesn’t matter. But if kids don’t get enough sleep, they cry, they’re cranky and they can’t do their work.

Regular routines, including healthy snacks and lunches, also help kids cope with the excitement of movie days, field trips and other end-of-school treats and activities. I’ve seen some kids who are just ‘Woo-hoo!’ out-of-control this time of year. It helps to reinforce that although things may be a little more free-form at school, your expectations and the teacher’s expectations for behavior are still the same.

2. *Take it outside*

Research shows that spending more time outdoors improves children’s concentration in school, lessens aggression and improves their ability to cooperate. It’s “a giant relief valve for everyone in the family,” writes outdoor lifestyle expert Rebecca Cohen in 15 Minutes Outside, a month-by-month collection of 365 easy and enjoyable ways to get out of the house and connect with your kids.

Try moving homework outside whenever possible—your kids will enjoy the novelty and be less likely to complain. Draw math equations in chalk on the driveway, act out a history lesson in the local park or curl up on the front porch to read aloud. If you give kids lots of opportunities to be outside after school and in the early evening, they won’t

be looking out the window as much during the school day thinking, 'Oh, I wish I was out there'. All that fresh air and the opportunity to let off steam also makes tackling any remaining after-dinner homework and bedtime easier.

3. Plan ahead

Get a head start on preparing your child to make the transition from one grade to another, and from in-school learning to summer learning. If he/she is struggling at school, schedule a meeting with the teacher and get some suggestions on enriching summer activities to help them improve their skills. If you're planning a trip, pick up a few books about the places you'll be visiting. Reading a child's edition of Anne of Green Gables, for example, will fuel your child's imagination about PEI, if that's your destination. Tying your vacation to literature or literature to your vacation is a great way to encourage reading in those last few weeks of school and into the summer.

Your child might also enjoy writing and illustrating a letter of introduction to next year's teacher, or to a younger student who will be in her grade level the following year telling her what to expect and how to prepare. (It can be as simple as "Buy a good lunchbox, find out where the bathrooms are and have fun!")

4. Acknowledge progress

Encourage your child to reflect back on his/her school year and think about what he/she has learned, what was challenging, how they dealt with it, and what they are proud of. You can sit down together to sort through all the artwork, projects and writing that was collected over the year and choose a few pieces to keep as mementos. It's a real motivator for kids when they look back at their work. It reinforces just how far they've come.

As the kids count down (and you do, too!), start planning something special to mark the last day of class. It's important to end the year on an upbeat note, whether it's a school's-out scavenger hunt, a class picnic in the park or a backyard barbecue complete with cake and balloons. School isn't just about academics, it's very much a social thing, too. Kids need a chance to celebrate the friendships and relationships they've made in the classroom all year. And after a year of packing lunches, overseeing homework and getting little dawdlers out the door on time, parents deserve to join in the celebration, too.

Have a Great Summer!

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