

The Upside of Digital Devices – Using Screen Time to Stop Summer Learning Loss

ANOTHER SCHOOL YEAR IS ENDING and for millions of children this means risking summer learning loss, partly because so many hours will be spent with screens.

Parents can build on strengths they already have to help their kids develop healthy screen habits and keep learning over the summer. It all starts with connecting the stories kids see on screens to the stories they read in books. To get the ball rolling, parents just need to use their own “storybook skills” while children are watching screens. Here’s how:



Schedule co-viewing (or co-gaming)

twice a week. You can pick a series your child loves, or a short video based on a book, like those produced by Weston Woods. Any story-based app or game will work, too.

Use your “storybook voice.” During screen talk, you’ll want to use the same tone you use when reading a story aloud to a child. This allows you to encourage, coax and tease out responses. Just like reading a story at bedtime, we want to enjoy the shared space and the cuddling, using a playful and caring tone.

Prime the mind. With a few simple words you can prime children to use higher order thinking and make the most of their screen time so they don’t watch mindlessly. Good priming gets the child excited about this fun, new way of using screens. The key is to make it fun (storybook voice!) so they’re interested in watching screens with an active mind. The first time, you say: “Today we’re going to do something special

and watch/play together! We’re going to look for what we like, what we don’t like and *why*.” After that you build on experiences by referencing things you’ve seen together. *Tip:* If you need to make dinner and want to allow some screen time, “prime” by letting your child know you’ll be talking.

Interact and talk *during* screen time the way you do when reading a book to a child.

Screen time is too often sedentary and solitary. When we watch or play with screens together, we give our children a totally new experience with screen time. You don’t have to watch *everything* with your child. Just do a little more co-viewing during the summer than you do during the rest of the year. *Tip:* Pick content that you know for your first co-play or co-viewing experience.

Share ideas and point out details. During story time with a book, children ask questions. They point out colors, shapes and characters they enjoy. You

contribute whimsical comments, perhaps tying real life experiences to the book. If a child points to the picture of a rabbit and says, "Bunny!" you might say, "Yes, we saw a rabbit in the yard today! What color was that rabbit?" Use that same kind of interaction during co-viewing. Every word counts in early childhood and the more words shared with parents, the better! *Tip:* Try using words like character, plot and setting when you're pointing out details. Your child will learn what the words mean by the way you use them.

Ask questions. You can P&Q (pause and ask questions) or ask questions while the program is running. "What do you think happened there?" "What kind of animal is that?" "Why do you think the character did that?" "What color is that?" "Where are they now?" "What's the setting?" Children can easily answer your questions while watching but don't hesitate to use the pause button to give them enough time to answer. *Tip:* If a child asks you what happened, try turning the question back - "What do you think happened here?" It's fun to replay in slow motion and look for clues!

Media reports. Once or twice a month ask your child to write or "screen talk" a media report. It's just like a book report and if they're too young to write, let

them perform their report like a reviewer! Simple book report templates abound on the internet.

Play * Draw * Co-Create. Move energy out of screen time and into art! Children can draw their favorite character in a new setting. Or change a part of the story of the story they didn't like. "If you didn't like the ending, what ending would be better?" If you loved a special setting, make up your own story pretending you're in that setting. *Tip:* Don't just act out the scenes from a movie, let the play or artwork unfold from the child's own imagination

Guiding children to "go deeper" with the stories on screens inspires them to connect what they're learning in school to screen time at home. That means a little co-viewing can boost learning and literacy while strengthening your connection with your child. Whatever screen content you choose, if you turn on children's minds before turning on screens, and then talk with them, they'll get smarter.

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