Written by Marcia Humphrey
Thursday, 02 July 2009 15:00

I have truly enjoyed my first couple of weeks of summer vacation --the sleeping in, the slower pace, and no homework. I feel like I did nearly as much homework as my children this past school year (although they probably wouldn't agree). Our biggest challenge was math. My daughter struggled and my husband and I (mainly my husband) spent a lot of time helping her.

I can't really say if it was my daughter or the teacher. I have concluded that sometimes the learning and teaching styles don't mesh well and the result is a major disconnect. Because we don't want one bumpy year in math to negatively impact her confidence or interest in arithmetic, we are setting up a few sessions with a math tutor. In fact, whether or not your child is struggling in school, a little summer brainwork is always beneficial. It helps to keep children confident in the skills they have learned throughout the year and it prevents "brain-rust." Here are a few simple suggestions on how to keep their brains "well-lubed."

Ready, Set, Read!
One of the best ways to help keep your child's brain keen is by picking up a book. Whether you are reading to your child or your child is reading to you, it is a great way to use the imagination and expand the vocabulary. Make reading fun by visiting the library at least once weekly. Even take advantage of the various story times and the book clubs for all ages. Fun ways to help with reading, writing and comprehension is by having the children write a book report or write letters to relatives (make sure you select the kin folk who will write your baby back!).

Summer Practice Packets
At the end of the year, some schools and teachers distribute practice packets designed to reinforce the year's learning. If your child received one make it a priority to have him work on it every day. If you did not get one, simply head out to the library for free resources or to a local bookstore or teacher resource store which has summer practice workbooks for every grade level and every subject. (I also snagged some great new workbooks at one of my favorite thrift stores, Arc's Value Village www.arcsvaluevillage.org) At our house we call this daily study Brainwork Time. Just like we want strong bodies, we want strong brains and they both must be exercised!

Find A Tutor
As a high schooler, my very first job outside of babysitting my cousin was tutoring a middle-schooler in math. It was a win-win because her grade improved and so did my confidence! If you and your child are overwhelmed by a certain school subject, get a tutor, even if you do it for a few sessions, it may be all your child needs to get on track. The math tutor we selected for our daughter is a retired teacher from the school she attends. My husband and I feel this is a worthwhile investment in her future. Still, our strategy is to get started with the former teacher and if we need further help, transition to a college student who we know that is majoring in math (and whose fee will be much less).

As parents our goal is to help our children to "get on the good foot" educationally speaking, that is. One of the ways we can assist them is by insisting that they keep exercising their brainpower-even when school is not in session-(use it or lose it). Encourage the love of learning by helping your child to see the relationship between the three r's (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and everyday life. Go to the library and get a free science museum pass and explain

to your daughter how science and math intersect. Who knows, you might have the next Einstein on your hands. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.