

Summer enrichment for children

By Elizabeth Lowe

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Ryan Schaaf, assistant professor of technology at Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore, offers five ways to keep children intellectually stimulated during summer months to help avoid what he calls the “summer slump.”

“It’s about keeping kids engaged,” said Schaaf, father of Connor, 7, and Ben, 1. “There are strategies and practices anybody can use that aren’t too much trouble and aren’t too expensive.”

1. Read

“You want it to be a low pressure situation, you don’t want to force it,” said Schaaf, who suggests keeping reading material around the house and visiting the library when children announce “I’m bored.”

Scheduling reading time – Schaaf recommends 15 minutes – helps children learn to read for fun, he said.

2. Go outside

“Family walks are fantastic,” he said. “You’re getting your exercise, enjoying the sun, bonding as a family. Add an observation element to it. It’s mostly for the exercise, but you can make any situation a learning experience.”

Schaaf also suggests gardening and outdoor play dates.

3. Create something

“Get kids to tinker, make and test things out,” he said. “It’s very informal learning.”

Do-it-yourself: Make a small terrarium by adding dirt, seeds and water to an empty plastic bottle. Then seal it and place it in sunlight.

4. Volunteer

“In the summer you have a lot of time,” he said. “It’s not about money, it’s about your time.”

Schaaf suggests getting involved in the community by connecting with your parish or school.

5. Media diet

“Trying to limit the amount of media they consume is important because they’re going to lose out on a lot of life,” he said. “There has to be balance.”

If kids request additional time watching TV or playing on an iPad, for example, Schaaf recommends parents choose educational shows, learning games and apps.

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