

Spare children summer boredom

By Betsy Flagler

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To stop summer brain drain, look for ways to tie what your kids like to do with what they're learning and practicing in school.

Look no further than your own kitchen, backyard or soccer field to glean ways to make learning fun.

A new book for inexpensive ideas is "Toad Cottages and Shooting Stars: Grandma's Bag of Tricks" (Workman Publishing, \$14.95, 2010) by Sharon Lovejoy, a grandmother and children's garden adviser.

One of Lovejoy's ideas: Make a backyard explorer's kit that includes: A big unbreakable magnifying glass; a drawing pad or journal; colored pencils or crayons; an inexpensive camera; binoculars; a headlamp for nighttime viewing; and a small tape or digital recorder.

Her philosophy: "Don't rush from point to point with your thoughts on a finish line," she writes. Stop and check out places your grandchild shows interest in.

Deji Badiru, Ph.D., an engineer who has experience as a soccer player, coach and soccer dad, agrees that kids should have fun while learning.

"Science and math can be fun when related to something that kids already love, such as sports," says Badiru, author of "**The Physics of Soccer**" (I Universe, for \$22.95, 2010.) "Understanding the physics behind soccer encourages combining popular recreational activities with educational activities."

In the context of play, fundamental subjects such as math, science, engineering and technology make more sense and become less intimidating.

Badiru, a professor in the Department of Systems and Engineering Management at the Air Force Institute of Technology in Dayton, Ohio, gives these examples:

--A ball at rest stays at rest until acted upon by a force such as a kick.

--For every action on the ball, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The ball pushes against the foot whenever the foot pushes against the ball.

Also, use the science of work and energy to explain how calories are burned when playing sports, or the science of evaporation to explain that sweating cools the body down during sports activities.

For your kids this summer, don't worry that they are missing out if you cannot afford day camps. Children benefit from having to come up with some of their own ideas within safe parameters. But don't let them resort to television and computer games. Unlike open-ended play, passive options such as watching

television and playing video games fail to enhance intellectual, social, emotional and physical development, according to the Alliance for Childhood at www.allianceforchildhood.org.

Remember when you are making your plans: Young children learn best through hands-on approaches and play, says Joan Almon, a former kindergarten teacher and executive director of the Alliance for Childhood. Preschoolers need practice this summer to continue to build strength in their hand and arm muscles.

Outside:

--Fill spray bottles with water and let your children spray plants or the sidewalk, then draw on the wet area with chalk.

--Give your child a bucket with a small amount of plain water and let him pretend to paint the side of your house with a large, clean brush.

In the kitchen:

--Sorting cereal into muffin tins and picking up small objects with mini tongs build fine-motor skills.

--Measuring ingredients for a recipe builds early math skills, and following directions.

For preschoolers, foster independence by letting them do the things they are able to do themselves.

--Taking care of their own toileting needs.

--Dressing themselves.

--Throwing away their own trash.

--Simple folding.

--Clearing their plates.

--Walking without being carried.

--Putting away their own toys.

--Washing their hands.

They will be much better prepared for school in the fall.

Parenting tip

Small adjustments in the way parents and teachers read books aloud can make large differences in children's literacy development, a recent study suggests. What helps: Pointing to words being read and talking about print, according to the study, published recently in the journal "Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools."

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