

My Summer Vacation

Parenting Strategies – May 2009

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With it only being the month of May, it might seem too early to think about summer vacation, but there are several things that you can do to help your child make the most of the next few months while contributing in positive ways to your child's college experience. So whether your child is going to begin the first year of college or return to a familiar campus, aren't there things that you want to teach him or her, or experiences that you would like your child to gain?

Sure summer should be fun and offer some downtime, but summer can also be learning time. I recall my stepson expressing that a particular summer was going to be his summer to "chill." I knew that was code for sleep late, play video games, watch movies, hang with friends, stay up late – and did I say "sleep late!" This was also the summer that I had in mind to teach him to cook a few items that he enjoyed. Little did I know that the ripple effect of this endeavor would result in his gaining confidence in the kitchen and pursuing a summer job at a local restaurant. It was through this experience that he strengthened his abilities to deal with quirky personalities, witnessed people who were passionate about their work, gained a firsthand view of how a family business was run, and realized he couldn't wear the same clothes to the restaurant two days in a row – hence the Laundry 101 lesson followed. And to think, all of this was set into motion with a sauté pan, olive oil, garlic, and some sliced mushrooms.

So during the next few weeks, take time to inventory what you might want your child to learn, and invite him or her to share what they would like to learn. Think about concrete skills, knowledge, and perspectives that

might benefit your child as he or she ventures off to college for the first time or returns for another year.

College is packed with transitions and change, not just during the first year, but during all the years, so having opportunities to develop and strengthen specific skills usually equates to greater success along the way. So let's look at some of the skills that contribute to a student's success during college:

- adjusting to residential living and various personalities;
- taking on a greater sense of personal responsibility;
- communicating outside of one's comfort zone;
- maximizing learning from courses and co-curricular experiences;
- feeling competent in daily living skills;
- managing one's time;
- connecting academic learning with career exploration;
- asking for help and accessing resources;
- having strategies and tools to address challenges;
- strong reading and writing skills.

You might consider using the above list as a way to begin to inventory what you want to strengthen in your child, and begin to identify the experiences during this summer that will facilitate your child's learning. As an example, if your child is working a traditional summer job that is more about making money and less about work that your child really enjoys, then you could encourage your child to also intern or shadow someone in a job or with a career that might be of interest. The ripple effects of this type of experience may include a chance to connect academic interests with career options, occasions to communicate outside of one's comfort zone, the opportunity to manage one's time juggling a job and internship, and a whole array of unanticipated possibilities for learning too. Similarly, if you always handled your child's paperwork, then you might want to

incorporate opportunities for you child to fill out a set of their own forms and to also make the calls necessary to arrange a new bank account, update medical coverage, acquire a loan, etc. I am always amazed by the number of college students I encounter who have worked since they were sixteen and who do not know how to fill out a W-4 Form for employment. They share with embarrassment that a family member has always done it for them and their awkwardness is uncomfortable to witness.

So when August arrives, and people begin to ask, "So what did you do this summer?" both you and your child can point to the learning and the doing. Know your child's preferred learning style; be creative, and work together to design and engage in fun and educational opportunities for personal growth. Then, when August arrives, you will be able to send your child to college knowing that he or she can do more things with greater ease and confidence; and as Lily Tomlin once said, "*The road to success is always under construction.*"