

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S INTELLECTUAL GROWTH OVER THE SUMMER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A CHORE

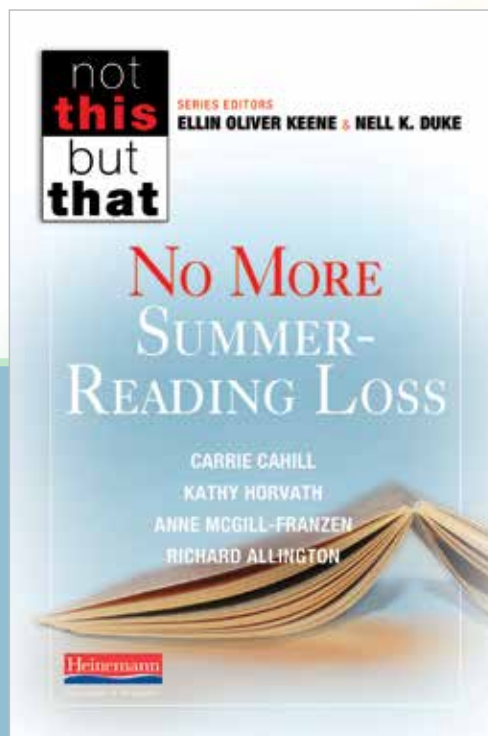
From Carrie Cahill and Kathy Horvath,
co-authors of No More Summer-Reading Loss

Dear Families and Caregivers,

The last quarter of the school year was abnormal for all of us in so many ways. Right now, you might be feeling anxious about whether your child will be academically behind next fall. It is inevitable that your child missed some learning opportunities, but we can shift our perspective from what is out of our control to focus on what we can do. Nurturing your child's intellect doesn't necessarily mean a lot of heavy work. Some simple actions can create a space for your child's intellectual development to grow into.

“I CAN BE CHANGED BY WHAT HAPPENS TO ME. BUT I REFUSE TO BE REDUCED BY IT.”

-MAYA ANGELOU



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But That** series at
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1 NOTICE AND NAME YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND GROWTH

Your child experienced a great deal of change this spring. They were cut off from much of what was familiar to them: the routine of school, their teachers, their friends and interaction with the outside world. In the face of all this adversity it is likely that your child has grown in some ways you might not yet realize or have drawn enough of their attention to. When children are in school, they have the benefit of receiving specific positive feedback from their teachers throughout the day. These micro affirmations are essential to building a positive self-concept. Each day, you can help your child develop a greater sense of competence by noting positive behaviors and decision-making.

LANGUAGE TO AFFIRM CHILDREN'S COMPETENCE

"You really tried so hard to carefully follow the directions."

"Thank you for sharing your thinking about that. I learned from you."

"It was really hard, but you kept trying, even when you felt like giving up."

"You showed initiative when you talked with your friends about the problem you solved together."

"You showed confidence in asking questions when you needed clarification."

"You did a nice job researching and finding resources on your own to better understand the information."

"It wasn't easy, but you figured things out! That is what life is all about."

2 LISTEN

Children learn to use their voice when adults listen. The ear of a trusted adult can give children the confidence they need to identify their initial thoughts, deepen their understanding, and develop their own beliefs. Listening requires restraint: instead of jumping in to do the work of adding background knowledge, it's often better to let children say what they know and to foster the curiosity that makes them pursue their own questions. Know that these conversations shouldn't just be about academic content areas but about emotions.

“THE QUIETER YOU BECOME, THE MORE YOU CAN HEAR.”

–BUDDHA

When we encourage our children to talk, it helps them make sense of the world. It is important to have conversations. Remember, it is a two-way street. Conversation draws out deeper thinking and brings about an abundance of ideas (which takes time). Conversation can happen anywhere and at any point of the day, such as while making dinner, driving in the car, or getting ready for bed. Ask your children what they think about various current events and encourage them to express their perceptions regarding these situations.

LANGUAGE TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN'S TALK & CURIOSITY

EMOTION

"What would you do if you were in that situation"?

"It seems like you are feeling..."

"Why do you think that you are feeling that way?"

"Tell me more."

"If you could be doing anything right now, what would that be? Why?"

"What do you think about that and why?"

"It sounds like you are saying..."

"If you had a friend in that situation, what advice would you give him/her?"

CONTENT

What makes you think that? Was there something that you read or heard that made you think that way?"

"I noticed you are interested in... Tell me what intrigues you about that?"

"How do you prefer to learn about topics that interest you? For example: books, magazines (short articles), podcasts."

"Tell me more."

"You really know a lot about...Is there anything more that you wish you could do with all you know?"

"I bet there are [scientists, artists, mathematicians, historians, etc.] who have wondered the same thing you are wondering right now. Want to find out? "

"I wonder if we could make something like that?"

"I wonder how we could test your idea?"

"I agree that was a bad ending/scene/character. How would you have written the script/book differently?"

3 EXTEND THE CONVERSATION THROUGH READING & WRITING

During the last few months, accessing good text has been a challenge. Your school and community libraries have most likely been closed, along with bookstores and second-hand stores. However, many community and school library websites have provided access to digital materials at no cost. If you have limited access to the Internet, try reaching out to your school for resources. You might be surprised by how much they have to offer. Reading and writing are life skills, not just assignments in school. These are authentic tools that we use daily for learning, communication, and enjoyment. Reading doesn't have to be a canon novel. Writing doesn't have to be a five-paragraph essay. (And maybe it never should!) If your child is reading and writing in some of the following ways, that's worth celebrating:

- Shows curiosity and investigates to find more information
- Writes directions for a recipe to share with someone else
- Chooses to read over another activity
- Proposes a different plan for a family routine
- Keeps a notebook nearby to record thoughts, goals and noticings
- Shares the joy of being taken to a different time, place, or adventure

WAYS TO SUSTAIN CHILDREN'S READING & WRITING

- Find print and digital media that relates to their interests. YouTube and Wikipedia can be great ways to learn together when your child asks you questions you can't answer. By looking for answers, you're modeling one of the essential academic moves -- curiosity and research.
 - "I'm not sure about that, let's go to the Internet for some help in finding out."
- Rather than focusing on factual/recall questions after reading, discuss the big ideas from the story, the author's intent or perspective, and how it relates to the bigger picture.
 - "What do you think that the author meant?"
 - "What would that look like in our community?"
- Reading comprehension is about constructing meaning from text. Through conversation you can help your child visualize what they are reading, ask questions about the text, infer what the author is trying to say, and synthesize the information. This will help them gain meaning from what they read and in turn, motivate them to read more.
 - "Describe how you visualize this character."
 - "What questions do you have after reading this?"
 - "What did you think before you read this, and how has your thinking changed?"
 - "How does this relate to other things that you have read?"

WAYS TO SUSTAIN CHILDREN'S READING & WRITING (CONT)

- Model that reading is an enjoyable experience (this is powerful for all adult role models). You don't have to pretend to read the novel War and Peace in front of your child. You can read a fishing/crafting magazine. The important thing for your child to see is that you get pleasure from reading.
 - "I really enjoy reading about..."
 - "I like reading during my free time because..."
- Family members can read the same book together to build upon a shared experience. Choosing to read various excerpts aloud with expression can make the story more memorable, which in turn, often leads to a deeper understanding. For older children, you can read the same book independently, while setting goals for chatting after so many chapters.
 - "I think that the character is motivated by... What do you think?"
 - "How do you envision this scene?"
- Encourage your child to share great texts with friends. Perhaps, they can start peer book chats on Zoom or Google Duo using social distancing. You don't need to be a part of the group or generate questions for them to discuss. Just let them have an authentic discussion about the book and what they are thinking.
 - "Why don't you tell your friends about that book?"
 - "Maybe, you can ask a friend to investigate that further with you?"
 - "How about reading that book with friends and chatting about it together?"

WAYS TO SUSTAIN CHILDREN'S READING & WRITING (CONT)

- Encourage your child to “try out” different styles of writing like those used by their favorite authors. All authors stand on the shoulders of those around them. Mimicking author techniques is not copyright infringement is honing one's craft.
 - “The book you are reading has a lot of dialogue, why don't you try adding some into your story or comic strip.”
 - “The way this author describes the scene and character really helps me visualize the story. Try describing something in your writing, and I will tell you what I picture in my mind. Is it close to what you intended?”
- Describe your experiences with reading. Share how you get lost in a good story or how you read to discover more about something you needed to know.
 - “When I read a good book, I can't put it down.”
 - “I really enjoy experiencing life through that character's eyes.”
 - “Reading this book makes me feel like I am in another time and place.”

Remember that your child is not going to follow through on every invitation to read and write you offer. That's okay. Recognize that an occasional response is a success. Keep trying! By helping your child find pleasure in reading, fulfillment from writing and value in having meaningful conversation, you will be preparing them for the next grade level and beyond.

“READING IS THE INHALE; WRITING IS THE EXHALE.”

–JUSTINE MUSK

We all have anxiety about what lies ahead. Without adding too much onto our already overburdened plates, we can choose to spend some of our time joyfully noticing the amazing young people who live with us and all that they have to offer. (Yes, they're not always amazing. None of us are.) The pleasure of their company rests in our ability to be curious about how they see the world. This stance of appreciation will show them that they are and will be amazing people. Over the years, our conversations with families have taught us so much about teaching. We have faith in you!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CARRIE CAHILL HAS BEEN AN EDUCATOR FOR 25 YEARS. After beginning her career in school social work, she served as a principal and a director of special education before becoming an assistant superintendent in 2004. In this position she oversees the curriculum development, assessment practices, and instructional delivery systems for schools in Midlothian, Illinois.

KATHY HORVATH IS ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT AT NORTHBROOK SCHOOL DISTRICT 28 IN NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS. She has focused district-wide with teachers to design a solid curriculum in all areas and develop a comprehensive instructional model from Kindergarten to eighth grade. She believes that as teachers build their confidence and expertise in nurturing their students as readers and writers, student achievement consistently increases along with their love of learning.