



ASK Jane

In the spirit of our founder, Jane Addams, we present a question each month centering on how teachers, parents, and other adults can help children overcome trauma, create positive relationships, and strengthen their ability to learn and heal. If you have a question you'd like to ask (in confidence, of course), please send an email to askjane@jpachicago.org.

Q: Dear Jane,

My children are done with school in two weeks. Summer can be a difficult time for us. How can I support them through this period?

Sincerely,

Monica

A: Hi Monica

I'm glad you asked. Transitions can be difficult for anyone at any time and are especially tough for kids. And while some schools go year 'round, it's likely your children look forward to and expect a summer off. So perhaps your question is also about how to help them during all the unstructured time they may have in the coming months.

When school lets out for the summer, kids are especially vulnerable to its unpredictability. They're no longer expected to wake up each day, get dressed, get ready for school, sit in class, head to recess and special classes, eat lunch with their friends and then transition back to class. They're no longer expected to stand in a straight line or keep their desks organized. Suddenly everything's different; their peers aren't around and their days flow endlessly instead of being organized. Additionally, depending on the age of your children, they may or may not have

the developmental capacity to understand and quantify time. It most likely seems to them like one confusing, amorphous experience. The good news is, there are ways you can support your kids in these moments. Here are some ideas that are not only constructive but relationship-forming:

1. **Keep learning consistent (and fun!) over the summer.** Take a weekly trip to the library and pick out books your children are interested in. Libraries often have special programs for children or children and parents like reading groups or other activities.

Check with your local branch for schedules. Encourage browsing through the different sections and be sure to look through some of the great picture books, atlases, and other resources the library provides. Unexpected discoveries can be very exciting for children (and adults). While there, check out their computers to find online resources, such as a YouTube science experiment you complete together at home. This might mean cooking pancakes together and learning and talking about ingredients, mixing, heating, and safety temperatures. Whatever this looks like on your family, keeping kids interested and curious will help them adjust back to the rigorous cognitive demands that school requires.

2. **Continue to provide creative outlets.** At school, children study a range of subjects and have time in art and/or music or dance class. At home, painting a picture together on the back porch, visiting a museum or curating a bug collection will keep kids curious, interested in and exposed to a range of subject areas. Chicago has so many great opportunities to explore everything from art to science, and libraries offer free passes to many museums to residents. Let them follow their interests and help out when you can.
3. **Enroll them in one of the Park District's many summer programs.** The Chicago Park District offers dozens of activities from sports to art to theater all around the city. Check out their offerings at the [Chicago Park District](#) website as well as those from [Chicago Summer Camps](#), many of which are free or very low-cost.
4. **Plan play dates.** When you make an effort to maintain their social connections, it sends the message that there are some constants over the summer. Friends from school are developmentally and socially attuned to your children, as they attended the same school, may have had the same teachers and likely have friends in common. This consistency communicates that something familiar will be waiting for them in the fall.
5. **Write a letter to their former and/or new teacher(s).** Promoting healthy relationships

with trusted adults outside of the home shows kids that they matter, that they are remembered and that they have an impact on the people around them. Even better, encourage you children to write thank-you notes to their old teachers and friendly notes to their soon-to-be teachers. Who knows, they may even write back!

6. **Give your kids a vote.** Allowing your children a voice in their summer activities tells them that you value their experiences and their opinion. It also promotes critical thinking and contemplation around their identity and desired hobbies, likes, and dislikes. It gets them thinking about who they are and what they're interested in. Encouraging this type of thinking early on sets up children for situations such as class selection in high school. And if they don't know, provide options. It never hurts to try something new. They can always make a new decision or run with a new idea the next day.

I hope these suggestions can start you on a path towards supporting transitions in your home. As always, I'm right here to answer your questions.

Most sincerely,

Jane JPA