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### Horizons

#### A Productive Summer



*Summer is the best time for students for developing socio-emotional skills by involving in neighbourhood, community activities & developing new friendships.*

Heat waves are engulfing major cities with temperatures in the highs of 52 degree centigrade making summer less enjoyable. Summer break is ending in India while the break has just begun in the United States. Summer is the time to cool off and plan for the next academic year. Importantly, parents and kids try to enjoy the vacation and time together, while trying their best to utilize the time to be productive. It is the time to enrich co and extra-curricular skills, which are becoming extremely necessary to survive in the competitive and flat world.

Interestingly, this summer is having not only heat waves, but also election heat waves in the

United States, India, and South Africa. By observing the election cycle, children get an idea about democracy, leaders and debating skills. Cultivating leadership, communication, and social skills are as important as gaining good grades in formal courses.

## **Cool Breeze**

The 9-month academic is packed with assignments, exams, tight schedules and sailing against multiple competitions, traffic problems, and other factors. This stress is like a heart wave and people look forward to resting, which is the summer months which in academic scenario is a season of cool breeze. Families take the time to rest and relax both on personal and academic levels. Summer is the best time for families to engage with their children by having open talk on their aspirations, wants and issues. It has become necessary these days to have holistic development of children who must grow as global citizen scholars not just as the next generation workforce.

## **Holistic Education**

One of the key issues that is facing society is the lack of good jobs and more importantly jobs that suit one's academic qualifications and interests. Jobs and those too high paying ones are becoming a rarity. Soft skills and better leadership abilities will be of immense help for youngsters to succeed in life. There needs to be concerted efforts by stakeholders to impart additional skills that will nurture leadership skills.

According to Nirav Shah, young entrepreneur, and the co-founder of Ahmedabad-based Diagonal Consulting (India) highlighted that by actively participating in groups and taking initiatives/decisions in line with one's own values, emphasizing the importance of engagement. "To me, leadership is more about clarity of thoughts that can be achieved over time and experience of life," stated Nirav Shah.

Indian society has traditionally prioritized education as is highlighted in the Sikshavalli of Taittiriya Upanishad, which is a convocation address for graduating students after studies. Given the elevated level of competition for professional courses, and given the limited number of seats, students can equip themselves with worldly skills while gaining academic credentials choosing Plan B path. Academics occupy priority but it is becoming increasingly clear that skills need to be acquired beyond the regular academic field. Observation, experience, and engagement are unconventional academic learning experiences that will enrich worldly skills.

Educationally advanced nations such as Finland, Sweden, and Singapore provide opportunities for broader leaning experience, which is proving to be worthy for economic development. The new education policy of India gives flexibility enabling students to grow as an overall person.

## **Learning Skills**

Summer months are the best time to equip oneself with additional skills. Governments around the world have realized the need for vocational and professional skills while pursuing rigorous

academic training. Germany is internationally known for its vocational and apprentice trainings. When Singapore Republic was being formed, importance of good public education along with vocational training, was emphasized. Engagement with peers and friends forms a valuable part of a sound learning experience. Isolation from society will be detrimental to academic, physical, and mental health. We have witnessed the COVID-19 situation which has pushed youngsters towards online friends instead of having 2 to 3 real friends. According to Gallup Poll, on an average American youngsters spend about 5 hours per day. More time on social media is leading to mental health issues and affecting social skills. As a father of a teenager, I can personally vouch for the stress and anxiety parents go through watching their kids spend many hours on social media.

More engagement with families and good friends helps youngsters to acquire skills that enhance social values such as empathy and working for the betterment of society. "Social values are of utmost significance along with the values that you have been raised with. Together, they add to your integrity which will help you develop immensely in your life. Additionally, they increase your acceptance in society and your working environment," stated Nirav Shah. As a person managing a consultancy that deals with people internationally, soft skills play important role which I witness during making deals and collaborations, added Shah.

Interestingly, social isolation is more prevalent in developing economies where the social set up is based on individualism and single-family systems. Psychologists encourage students to spend time in the neighborhood and play with friends in the neighborhood for better mental and social development when they are growing up. Thankfully, in India, even in the present fast paced world and flat system of living, students still play within their flat community and neighborhoods, which is encouraging. Particularly in summer times, apart from vacation times, parents should encourage neighborhood play and engagement in a safe environment.

Children must be encouraged to pursue their interests, say sports, literary pursuits, and science interests as part of effective utilization of summertime. Local public libraries can engage with NGOs in promoting summer reading programs as reading is an important part of child development. State and national governments should focus on supporting summer programs as part of national development.

### **Cooling Off in Summer**

As we all look to spend vacations in hilly resorts and cooler regions to get away from the heat, it is also the time for the parents and kids to relax, rest and strategize.

Apart from an 8-hour, 5-day work week, families should emphasize the better utilization of free time in a balanced way. Co and extra-curricular activities have been shown to motivate students towards their betterment, and improve physical, mental, and academic health.

Summertime is for rest and enjoyment and at the same time, opportunities for families to plan the future for their next generation. It is important that families do their part by taking time to discuss the aspirations and goals of youngsters. "We must develop our own goals based on one's values and understandings of life. Aspirations and dreams are like small goal posts which keep us busy," stated Nirav Shah.

Social engagement plays a vital role in personal development and what better time to actively engage with the family, neighborhood and the society than summer!

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