

A young boy with dark hair and glasses is smiling while playing a black piano. He is wearing a white and dark blue sweater. The background is softly blurred, showing indoor plants and a window with curtains.

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# Choosing a Summer Camp

Now is the time to register for summer camp; nearly infinite choices.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**M**any families with school age children will plan to have their children spend some of the much-anticipated summer season in camp. If you haven't yet selected camps for your children, now is the time.

"Popular classes and programs always fill early," said Kevin Rechen, camp director of Summer at Norwood in Potomac, Md. "Families that are choosing a camp based on a specific program or class should register as soon as they can."

Whether you choose a traditional day camp, a specialty camp or a sleep away camp, the Washington, D.C. region has a multitude of offerings. The array of options can be overwhelming for some parents, but summer camps can be an important part of a child's development. Local child development experts say there are a few things to keep in mind when choosing for a camp.

"Summer camp is an opportunity for children to develop social skills with their peers," said Linda Gulyn, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Marymount University in Arlington, Va. "Camps give the benefits of social interaction in a more relaxed setting."

When selecting a camp, there are factors that parents should keep in mind. "When parents are looking for a camp they should try to find a camp where they're comfortable with the facility, the programming and counselors and staff," said Rechen.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

**Campers at Hidden Oaks Nature Center find something interesting while exploring the creek.**

An array of specialty camps offer children a chance to focus on one activity.

"Developmentally, as children get older they get more specialized in their skills and interests," said Gulyn. "Summer camp is an opportunity to hone in on those skills. Go with the child's interest and skills and further develop those because they are an important part of a child's identity."

Specialty camps can help children develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

ing skills.

For example, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria offers camps that include Quadcopters and Video Editing, MiKiDo Mixed Martial Arts, CSI Detective, Hunger Games, Civil War, Fantasy Battle Gaming, Filmworx Movie Making, Eco-Adventures, Junior Musical Theater, Zooology, [and] Junior Veterinarian, said Linda Stratton of SSSAS.

**OTHER SPECIALTY CAMPS** include cooking camps, yoga camps and sports camps that run the gamut from tennis to hockey.

"A specialty camp gives children a sense of one particular area for a short period of time and allows them to decide if it is something that they want to pursue long-term," said Bethesda, Md., resident Deborah Helfeld who has taught art and yoga summer camps.

At George Mason University, high school juniors and seniors will have an opportunity to attend a camp that will give them a head start on college. "It's not your parents' summer camp," said Sudha Kamath. "Mason is giving high school juniors and seniors the chance to take some rare classes for college credit, covering everything from insects that crawl underground to objects that spin through outer space."

Cathy Evans, director of special projects at George Mason University said, "Subjects include astronomy, biology, chemistry, computer science, economics, environmental science, ethics, global affairs, health behavior, history, mathematics, nutrition and public speaking. The sky's the limit as students explore topics like 'Stars, Galaxies and the Universe' and 'The Ecosphere.'"

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## Summer Learning Activities

Local educators offer tips to keep children learning during the summer.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**W**hen summer vacation begins and school ends in a few weeks, learning doesn't have to take a hiatus. Students can keep their academic skills sharp without entering a classroom or even sitting down with a pencil and paper.

Local educators say opportunities for reading, math, science and history skills are plentiful and none require that children set foot in a school. From a walk in the park to a trip to the grocery store, teachable moments are virtually everywhere.

"There are a thousand ways to do it, but reading is critical," said Marjorie Myers, Ed.D., principal, Francis Scott Key Elementary School in Arlington. "I think the most important thing to do is read in a fun way. Read as a family. Parents can read challenging books to their children. Go to your local library and take advantage of fun

activities there.

When it comes to science, Len Annetta, Ph.D., professor of Science at George Mason University says he and his wife Jennifer spend a lot of time at the Smithsonian museums with their two children, Samantha, 13, and Joey, 11.

"We particularly like the Air and Space Museum," he said. "It keeps them engaged in science. We walk around together and we ask them questions after we leave a museum. When they get home they get to go online and do more research on things that interest them."

A shopping trip can also be an opportunity for a math lesson, said Myers. "Take your children to the grocery store and use actual money instead of credit cards, so the children can see a value for money and numbers," she said. "Give children an allowance so they can make the connection between money and the cost of things they want to buy."

"Keeping a travel or camp journal is a fun and easy way to support academic skills," said Benita

**"The most important thing is to read in a fun way."**

— Marjorie Myers, Ed.D., Francis Scott Key Elementary

Cathy, director of admissions at Grace Episcopal School in Alexandria. "A travel or camp journal reinforces writing, geography and social studies and organizational skills."

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# Many Ideas for Summer Activities

## Avoid those dreaded words: 'I'm bored.'

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**M**olly McAlister enjoys the freedom of summer, but there are three words she dreads hearing: "Mom, I'm bored." Creating activities to keep her three children busy during the summer is a task she enjoys, but it isn't always easy.

"I can't afford to send all three children to camp," said McAlister who lives in Centreville. "I love taking the kids swimming or on bike rides, but sometimes I run out of ideas."

Many parents allow "screen time" to keep children happy, but it's important to interact with them as well.

"Some parents will give their child an iPhone or an iPad to entertain them," said Michele C. Garofalo, Ed.D., assistant chair, Department of Counseling and a professor of Psychology at Marymount University in Arlington. "Interacting with children and being involved with them rather than giving them electronic activities is important. It is important for kids to figure out how to interact with their parents and friends."



PHOTOS BY GENE BUONACORSSI

"Summer is a wonderful time for parents to get to know their kids and interact with them in a different way," said Garofalo, who lives in McLean.

One way that families can spend quality time together is by creating art, said Dabney Cortina of the McLean Project for the Arts in McLean. In addition to summer camps, McLean Project for the Arts offers family workshops where parents and children create art together.

"The whole process of creating is so important to a child's development and it's so important to be with your children and create something together," said Cortina. "I see the smiles as the children and adults put their heads together to create things. I think

it's also a wonderful release for adults."

Community service projects are a great way to spend time and help children learn during the summer. "Let them spearhead a yard sale," Garofalo said. "Kids gather the items, make flyers and put the flyers in everyone's mailbox. They can donate the money to charity so you can tie in a service project."

Spend time in the kitchen. "You and your children can do a lot of baking and donate the items to a homeless shelter," said Garofalo. "With parental approval and guidance, kids can also do dog walking or water flowers for neighbors who are away."

For families who want to spend time in nature, Len Annetta, Ph.D. Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at

George Mason University suggests the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The park, which is home to more than 160 species of birds, has been recognized National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area.

"Our area has so much history," said Annetta. "Most of these place don't cost money but can immerse students in something educational, which is really critical."

For parents who plan a summer of varied activities, specialty camps as well as parent-child activities are worthy options. Even one or two sessions of week-long specialty camps can add to a child's summer.

Deb Burger of the Potomac Horse Center in North Potomac, Md., said they offer camps where children learn equestrian skills and are given information about the history of horses, breeds, colors, markings, anatomy, horse care and grooming. "Campers also do horse-related arts and crafts," said Burger. "They have a good time, make friends, increase their love of horses and improve their ability to ride. Kids come from Maryland, Virginian and even overseas."

Tony Castrilli, Director of Public Affairs for Fairfax County says the county is offering nature camps during the summer.

In Alexandria, Morgan Maloney runs the Arcadia Farm Camp for Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture in Mount Vernon. "Campers learn about farm life first hand," she said. Activities include collecting eggs tilling soil and planting seeds.

## Choosing a Summer Camp

FROM PAGE 3

Camp Greenway at The Madeira School offers three options for two-week camp sessions with outdoor and indoor activities, said Laura Temple, spokeswoman for school in McLean.

The Arlington Art Center offers summer camps for children and teens that meet daily for several sessions throughout the summer, 3550 Wilson Blvd, Arlington. Classes range from portfolio development to drawing, acrylic painting, and contemporary landscapes with oil paint.

**ANOTHER OPTION** is sleep away camp, which can sometimes be a nerve-wracking but rewarding experience for both a parent and a child.

How does a parent know that their child is ready for to make this leap? "It is going to vary from child to child and family to

family," said Michele C. Garofalo, Ed.D., assistant chair, Department of Counseling and a professor of Psychology at Marymount University in Arlington. "I think if a child has spent time having sleep overs with friends and has done ok, and is independent and feels comfortable sleeping at friends' houses then it should be fine."

Garofalo suggests that the first sleep away camp experience should be brief. "I think you want to do a shorter experience to get them ready. The first summer, send them to a four-day camp to test the waters. Their first experience should be at a camp that is close to home."

An open dialog between parent and child is key. "Explain to the child that they are going to be on their own and tell them what will be expected of them," said Garofalo. "Parents can prepare their children and have an honest conversation about what will happen at the camp."

### CAMPS, CLASSES & WORKSHOPS

**Theatre Classes.** Encore Stage & Studio is holding classes and mini camps for children in grades K-8 at on Saturdays at Thomas Jefferson Community Theatre, 125 S. Old Glebe Road, Arlington, and Tuesdays and Wednesdays after-school at Theatre on the Run, 3700 S. Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington. Visit [www.encestageva.org](http://www.encestageva.org) for a list of classes.

**Summer Art Camps.** Summer camps for children and teens meet daily in several sessions throughout the summer at Arlington Arts Center, 3550 Wilson Blvd, Arlington. Classes

range from portfolio development to drawing, acrylic painting, and contemporary landscapes with oil paint. Visit [www.arlingtonartscenter.org/aacsummercamps](http://www.arlingtonartscenter.org/aacsummercamps). Original art classes for all ages and all skill levels are offered year-round.

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