

# Fresh Ideas for the Summer Break



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Summer holidays – does this phrase conjure up memories of relaxed months that you spent playing with friends in the neighbourhood, of going to grand parents' and relatives' homes, with lots of time for free play and exploring? Your mother probably spent time catching up with the rest of the family and cooking for the large brood, while your father most likely stayed back at your home town (or city) and carried on his work routine.

Fast forward to the present - when we look around us, we find that summer breaks are no longer the leisurely, lazy months where children are left to their own devices. Your thoughts, like those of many fellow parents, are most likely veering around questions like, “How am I going to keep my child engaged, entertained and stimulated for two whole months? How can I give her a sense of achievement and contentment at the end, even while she has a fun and relaxed time?”

ParentEdge has put this feature together just for parents like you who want to ensure your children have a fun-filled learning experience this summer. Read on.

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# A DIFFERENT WAY TO PLAN THE SUMMER BREAK

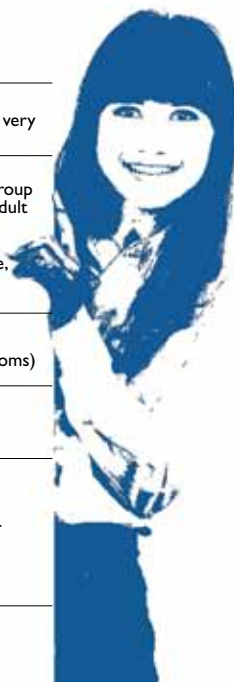
Spread over two or more months, the summer break is the best time for your child to explore, experiment and take risks, and engage in activities that complement or supplement what she does during the school term. Summer breaks are a great time for children to dive deep into subjects of interest, immerse themselves in their passions, look around and understand their world better, hone their skills and more.



While researching this feature we spoke to many parents and children - we found that there is a dearth of ideas on how to keep children engaged during this long break. And so we have drawn up for you an age-wise ready reckoner of sorts (below and in the pages that follow), with categories of illustrative ideas. We hope you will find this useful to attempt a multi-pronged approach that enhances your child's emotional, physical and mental well-being.

## Activities for the summer break

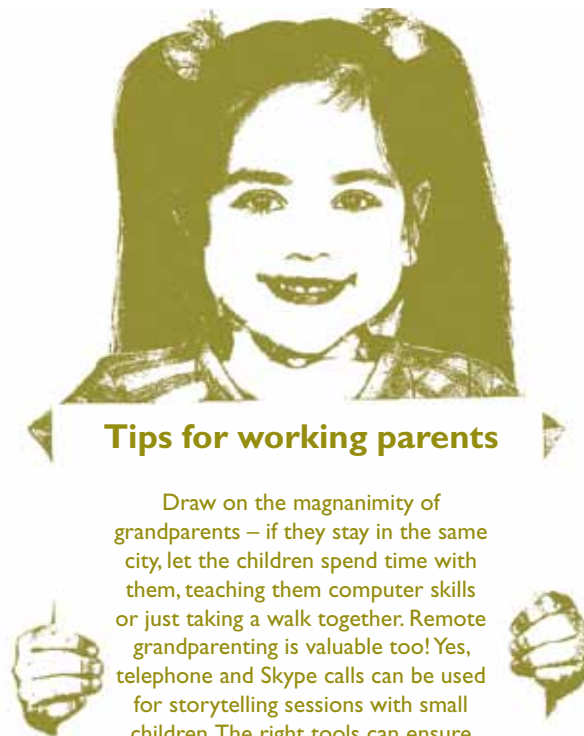
	Below 9 years	9 – 13 years	14 – 18 years
Life Skills	Sleeping by herself in a different room  Packing her school bag – filling water bottles, checking stationery (e.g. pencils sharpened)  Running an errand inside the residential complex/within the neighbourhood  Learning to swim	Attending her first sleep over – may be at a relative's or neighbour's home.  Taking some form of public transport alone	Running a complex errand – like depositing a cheque at an ATM  Taking up a summer job/ internship  Learning to drive (16+)
Academic Skills (with a twist)	Writing and illustrating a book (made of one A4 sheet)	Drawing up a weekly budget for the household	Fixing a chronic household problem. E.g. a room that is very cold in winter
Travel	Staying with grandparents in a different city/town	Being part of an organised tour/ overnight camp	Going on a self-organised group tour with friends and one adult to supervise  Going on a mother-son hike, father-daughter cycling trip
Art & Craft	Drawing up the family tree (with grand parents' assistance)	Making a scrapbook as a present for a grand parent/ relative/ friend	Painting the balcony wall (or a panel in one of the rooms)
Family Time	Teaching a grandparent some computer skills	Watching old home videos together	Trying karaoke together  Pursuing outdoor sports
My bit for society	Sorting cupboards and setting aside toys/clothes/games to give away to charities	Putting together a play or dance with friends, to be staged at a nearby old age home  Teaching the household help basic literacy skills or helping her children with academics.	Volunteering with a not-for-profit organisation
Technology	Learning to use e mail	Learning to make presentations	Building a website



## HOW TO CHOOSE ACTIVITIES

Ok, so, what is next? How do I pick what is relevant for my child? The guidelines that follow may be of some help:

- Let your child take up at least one pursuit or project to be completed during the two month break. In this digital age when attention spans are low, sustaining interest in a task or a project over a long period of time can help inculcate persistence, patience and the much needed long term orientation in your child. She will also learn to plan and set intermediary goals.
- Let your child pick an area of weakness to work on – let her decide what to focus on, based on where she thinks she will get the maximum benefit. The challenge may be related to academics - like poor spelling - or a behavioural issue like being short-tempered. Think of a game plan together and set measurable goals. The sense of achievement that your child will derive on making significant progress in her chosen area will help her start the new school year on a high.
- Pull out your list of long-pending projects and see if there are any that can be tackled this summer - it could be setting up a garden in your balcony or, making a beginning in a new sport - co-opt your child and see if you can make this an interesting summer project. Nothing like killing two birds with one stone!
- Remember, though, that this an exercise in choosing a summer project for your child! So, be flexible and also consider ideas that do not excite or interest you. On a related note, do not force your child to pursue something that you believe is the right or the done thing. For example, if your ten year old daughter wants to try a Bollywood dancing class, encourage her, rather than persuading her to pursue singing, which is your passion!
- It's alright if you find that there are days when your child is doing nothing. It is also fine if your child complains of boredom once in a while. It is not necessary - in fact, it is not advisable to pack each day with so much that it actually ends up cramping your child's creativity.



### Tips for working parents

Draw on the magnanimity of grandparents – if they stay in the same city, let the children spend time with them, teaching them computer skills or just taking a walk together. Remote grandparenting is valuable too! Yes, telephone and Skype calls can be used for storytelling sessions with small children. The right tools can ensure that your older tween plays chess or scrabble with grandma every afternoon.

Form a group of like-minded parents.

Draw up a schedule for the coming week, with each of you volunteering a few hours to take the group of children to a museum, the zoo or a dance show. Or, you could bank on home makers for the week days and take charge of the weekends.

## PICKING SUMMER CAMPS AND CLASSES

While it is quite possible to organise your child's summer activities without attending camps and classes, one cannot deny that there are advantages when someone else does the thinking and organising on your behalf!

With summer classes and camps mushrooming round every corner, you however need to separate the wheat from the chaff, while choosing the one best suited for your child.

While classes are of shorter duration and last a few hours, camps are usually longer, lasting 8-10 hours. Also, the former generally focus on one specialised area e.g. swimming or painting, while summer camps offer a range of activities, from singing and dancing to craft and games. Young children like to try out a range of activities as they are usually still undecided about what they like best. However, children younger than nine may be better off with shorter camp durations of less than four hours. They will also be comfortable around familiar faces, so choosing a class offered by the school that the child goes to or a camp in the neighbourhood that her friends will attend as well, may be the thing to do.

Most children aged 13 and above prefer to take up an interest close to their heart and devote attention to it rather than dabble in many things. For this age group, specialised sports classes (tennis, cricket), hobby classes (sketching, music lessons) and classes that need special equipment (robotics, aero modelling) are more suitable. This age group is also more enthusiastic about outdoor programmes (camping, trekking, climbing etc.).

That said, if you need to provide adult supervision of your children outside the home for long stretches in the day (8 hours and above), and cannot manage the logistics of picking up from and dropping to multiple classes, you can still explore full day summer camps – there is no right or wrong summer activity, only what works for your family and what does not.

Whichever camp or class you choose, do not forget to ask the following questions:

- Are the outcomes of the camp/class clear? Does your child know what she is going to accomplish?
- Are the people at the class friendly, trained, motivated?
- How well-laid out are the safety and emergency procedures?
- What is the ratio of facilitators to children?

And, before you plunge into the age-wise approaches that follow, here is an educationist's take on the role of parents during the summer break.

### PERSPECTIVE



**On how parents can make summer an enriching experience for their children**

Interview with Ms. Poornima Jairaj, Educationist & Chairperson, Governing Council, Amber Valley School, a residential school located in Chickmagalur

#### **How can the summer holidays be a learning experience for children?**

If parents can remember that learning is not just about academics, then they will find it quite easy to provide an enriching experience to their children during the holidays.

It goes without saying, though, that this will mean a lot of parental involvement – the highlight of summer holidays cannot be a vacation planned by a tour operator or holiday planner!

I recall our school's experience with excursions – we always try to combine the fun quotient with a learning objective such as understanding a different culture or a way of life. Parents could adopt this approach too.

#### **What should parents be wary about, when it comes to summer holidays?**

Though children quickly regain their rhythm when school restarts, I would suggest parents maintain a semblance of order and schedules during holidays too. Completely unscheduled holidays do leave their mark on the child – even two weeks of waking up at 10 am is unacceptable, according to me.

While school schedules are about doing 'compulsory' things, holidays should be about 'optional' things. Children should also be given free range to explore and deepen certain areas of interest - specialised sports camps, swimming camps or theatre workshops enable children to immerse themselves in something that they love.

Again, while holidays are about freedom to pursue the individual's interest, children should not be left in isolation. Parents should ensure that they get enough social interaction, and involve them in group activities, whenever possible.

#### **Some hints for families with working parents?**

Do set aside weekends for exploration and travel. Make time for the children and organise your work schedules suitably in the summer break. Do take an active role in the child's reading habits – for younger children, reading aloud is the best way to bond and get quality time together. With older children, discuss books that you read over dinner, and articles in the newspaper during breakfast time.

## CHILDREN BELOW 9 YEARS

Children of this age usually spend lots of time at home and around a parent. They are also in the process of mastering several little everyday skills. What better way to enjoy the summer with your little ones, than to spend quality time with them while they learn, by engaging in simple activities and pleasures?

### Strike while the iron is hot – involve your child in daily household activities

Young children follow their parents around – wanting to participate in cleaning the car, emptying the garbage can and cutting vegetables. It is we adults who fear the mess and possible physical injury and desist from allowing children to participate. This summer, why don't you set aside your tendency to say 'No' and encourage your child to help around the house? Not only will he be proud of the results, but also be gainfully employed! See Box below for some ideas.

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Mrs. Meena is a teacher at Navadisha Montessori School, Chennai. Here's what she recommends for educative summer fun for young children:

#### 3-6 years:

Setting tables, washing handkerchiefs, making chapathis under adult supervision, assisting with cooking – grating, garnishing etc.

#### 7-8 years

Sewing buttons, mending torn clothes, learning embroidery, doing simple chores and errands for which payment is given (they can use a piggy bank which graduates into a savings account)

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may be just the right time to let your child try to master a new skill that will help make life easier.

### Setting new rules

Children often feel hedged in by rules and regulations, and the summer break may be the time to let them challenge a few, and define some anew. Yes, offer your son an "Eat-what-you-like-week" or your daughter a "Wear-what-you-like-day" and both your children a "Do-what-you-like-day." This may be the best way for them to learn that freedom comes with responsibility, and that mindless indulgence is usually accompanied by not-so-pleasant outcomes. Again, you may be the one who is surprised - perhaps your daughter's unusual clothing choices are great after all, and perhaps your rules on television watching were far too severe? Try this experiment with an open mind and have fun in the process.

### Grant wishes

All those harmless little wishes that you never had time to fulfil ("Not now, honey.") – riding the big, red bus to see where it goes (You know that it goes 40 kms. away from home but your little one does not!), a midnight feast at the playground, a play date with a class mate who lives very far away – make time for such small pleasures and see the smiles on your children's faces.

**Cook up a storm!**

Young children show a natural inclination towards food preparation and presentation. Walk into any Montessori environment, and you will find even six-year-olds happily pounding chana, kneading atta or slicing cucumber. Before children turn into disinterested tweens, it makes sense to equip them with a few culinary skills. Not only will you be keeping them engaged and happy, but you can also train them to fix themselves healthy snacks – cheese toast, bhel puri and the like.

If you are interested in baking, involve your children. The absence of an exposed flame makes cooking with an oven safer than cooking with a stove. Children also seem to do better at baking than with cooking – they enjoy the simple and clear instructions, and the output is invariably as expected and tasty! However, if your patience levels are sorely tested by the messes made by young children, then perhaps you should send them to baking classes. (See Box)

**Make them think!**

The flip side of omnipresent digital media and involved parenting is that young children have become rather prone to seeking ready, easy answers rather than trying to explore and think for themselves. This summer, why don't you help your child put on her thinking cap? See Box aside for some suggestions for simple home-based activities.



Image Courtesy: Sparkling Mindz, Bangalore

**Little Chefs**

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Devina Hemdev

I bake with 3-9 year old children and we have fun making healthy bakes (apple crumble, carrot bake) and eye-catching stuff (cupcakes). Cookies are of course an all-time favourite.

My take on children's fascination with baking is that they are able to produce something indistinguishable from that of an adult's. If they draw something, one can make out that it is a childish doodle, but not with a cupcake that they have decorated – you can hardly tell that a child did it.

Baking is healthy self-expression. An 11-year old once requested to bake his birthday cake with my assistance, and he made a grave-yard cake! I also let the children wash up and clean – they have oodles of fun with soap and hot water.

Devina conducts classes at  
Cafe Ole, Jayamahal Extension, Bangalore. Ph: 080-40967236, 9880622122

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Image Courtesy: Cafe Ole at Hide and Peek, Bangalore

**Spurring Creativity at Home**

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Sreeja Iyer

**Stick 'em up** – Ask your the child to create an imaginary animal/bird/ machine or alien out of chapathi dough, corn flakes, fruit and vegetable peels.

**A world without...** - Let the child choose one item that is crucial to her or close to her - this could be her favourite snack, the electric fan, or the computer. She then lives out one week without that item. The fun is in the way she copes and also in the process of thinking of alternatives.

**Playing the creator** – Give your child some random items such as a shoe box, sticks, bubble wrap, plastic spoons, rubber balls and challenge her to create an arrangement that represents something.

- Sreeja Iyer is Co-Founder of Sparkling Mindz, Bangalore - they conduct thinking skills programs for children 5-13 years. [contact@sparklingmindz.in](mailto:contact@sparklingmindz.in) or +918095267849

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## CHILDREN 9-13 YEARS

Not an easy-to-entertain but 'I-have-my-own-tastes' child, not a rebellious, 'You-are-so-boring' teen - is that why the term 'tween' was coined for these in-between years? Children in this age group are learning to unfold their wings. While they no longer require close hand-holding, they do need their parents to set directions for their activities, and provide the occasional monitoring. It is a delicate balance for the parent – to expose the child to various things yet not micro-manage as one needed to do for younger children. It is this balance that we have tried to keep in mind while suggesting activities for this age group. Read on.

### First summer project

Yes, your child is definitely too young to be associated with an organisation or a formal set up. But you can help her get a sense of achievement by working on a problem or a neighbourhood issue during this summer break. Many urban dwellers today live in apartment complexes that have common problems - profusion of bee colonies, exploding populations of pigeons or speeding within the complex.

By drawing together a group of children of mixed ages and giving them a structured approach to studying one of these problems, you may well have found a way to keep your child occupied and engaged through the summer. The anchor person could be a 12 year old who can divide up the tasks – information collection, seeking solutions, presentation to the management committee of the residents' association – among the younger volunteers depending on their age and inclination. In fact, younger children (6-7 years) can easily collect information (how many bee colonies are present) while older ones (8-10) can collect feedback (how many residents are willing to explore solutions other than destruction of beehives) and information (instances of bee attacks) and also disseminate valuable information (precautions to be taken).

Such an enterprise teaches children about the importance of doing something about the issues that face us – the hallmark of a participative, active citizen rather than a passive one.

Ipsitha and Sanjana tried, in a similar way, to demonstrate to their community the importance of waste segregation (see Box)



### Ipsitha and Sanjana on their waste segregation drive

“We found that in our community segregation would result in 90% of household waste being recycled or converted to compost – this was enough impetus. We introduced our mission with a Power Point presentation at a neighbour's birthday party. We also went door to door to explain the three kinds of waste; we set up camps and also had adults speak to some tough cookies.

### How it went

Some people were super supportive. They readily agreed to our suggestions and helped spread the word. Others simply refused to listen to us or take us seriously. Then there were those who were too lazy to segregate wastes and claimed they didn't have the time. We used lots of statistics to counter their flippant attitude; after all, everyone knows how adults love their statistics!

### Learning Quotient

When we went from door to door, we had to learn how to address people, the best way to approach them and convince them to hear us out and to take necessary action. This developed our communication and projection skills and also taught us a lot about hard work, perseverance and persistence.

“It was the kids' initiative through and through, but there are some people who will only listen to adults and some who simply refused to cooperate and were quite rude. Such cases demand adult intervention, and we had to step in a few times.

– Mrs. Sharada, Sanjana's mother

I was there mostly for moral support, though at first, I did guide them through the planning and executing processes, and helped kick-start the discussion on the topic with family and friends.

– Mr. Sriram, Ipsitha's father

**Imbibing the spirit of enquiry – Feel, touch and see Maths and Science**

As your child grows beyond the initial primary years at school, you will find that she is learning a lot in various subjects. You need to ensure that she continues to ask questions, seeks the unknown and willingly treads into uncharted territory.

Anupama G of Brainstars opines, “Learning has become routinised and exam/competition driven. It is removed from real life. Take a concept like measurement, for instance - children are unable to see the applications of this concept in their immediate surroundings.”

The summer break gives you a lot of time to work with your child, either in an area that is of interest to her, or an area that you think she should develop. Hands-on activities in the form of experiments and projects will help her cultivate the scientific temperament of enquiry. Please see Box for details of enrichment programmes offered by Brainstars and HeyMath! These programmes, which include quizzes and talks by practitioners, will also kindle your child’s interest.

Says Nirmala Sankaran, HeyMath!, “Apart from being engaging, our programme helps students understand scientific enquiry and the process; it also makes the child appreciate the need for perseverance and it teaches the child the right attitude – which is more important than raw intelligence.”

**Brainstars, Bangalore** offers a programme with do-it-yourself experiments, projects in science and maths, ‘science of maths’ and ‘maths of science’ for children aged 8 to 10 years. For children aged 11 to 15 years, they offer experimental activities in physics, chemistry, maths and biology, projects in science and maths, movie shows, sci talk, sci quiz, stargazing and origami. ‘Lectures @ 5’ on Saturdays is a forum of professionals, young students, science and math enthusiasts. Contact: 080-26622558

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**HeyMath!, Chennai** in association with Israel Center for Excellence through Education (ICEE), Jerusalem offers children in Grades Five to Seven a chance to perform experiments and investigations with no specified protocol. The materials are provided, and children must proceed, as a scientist would, into the unknown. ‘Be a Scientist’ online club, and a virtual quiz conducted by the ICEE team from Jerusalem are other notable aspects. HeyMath! also offers after school enrichment programs in Maths. Contact: 044-43481516 (Monday through Friday 9:30 am - 6:30 pm)



Image Courtesy: Brain Stars, Bangalore



Image Courtesy: HeyMath!, Chennai



Image Courtesy: Brain Stars, Bangalore



Image Courtesy: HeyMath!, Chennai



### Give children a chance to get close to nature

With concrete structures usurping the precious little green space in urban communities, children have fewer places to observe flora and fauna. Children in the 'in-between' age category are also likely to withdraw into themselves, with books or video games, preferring the relative comfort of indoors to the sweltering heat of summer. Entice them with a packed picnic lunch to be eaten in a patch of green lawn within the complex – they may get a chance to observe chameleons and squirrels. Organised activities on farms at the periphery of cities can be a godsend to urban parents. Most such places have trained adults who supervise the children interacting with the animals and birds on site. Such activities may also be preferable to the traditional visit to the zoo.

Observing plants, trees and animals in such a setting allow the child to learn a good deal about habitats, climate and adaptation – learnt in a fun, interactive way instead of from an encyclopaedia.

Please see Box on how such interactions nurtured a deep, unusual love for reptiles and insects in Pranav.



### Focus on and deepen a pursuit

Summer holidays can be the time that your child takes up a pursuit almost-full time – something impossible during other times of the year owing to school schedules. This may be the best time to take them to competitions, exhibitions and events related to your child's interest, and which are held outside the city you live in. Mrs. Aparna Banerjee, Director of Antara Artists Collective and a dance teacher, has a daughter who is 11 years old. "My daughter is very passionate about dance and music. She learns Odissi, Kathak and Hindustani vocal. So most of her summer holidays have been spent in getting special training for these. Last summer, we went to Orissa for a special training camp in dance. She had a lot of fun and learnt a lot."

### On Creepy Crawlies

"Even as a kid, I have always been interested in nature, and animals in particular - I was always running around catching them- frogs, toads, snakes. One summer, I attended the amazing herpetology camps organized by Jerry Martin near Bangalore. I got to handle animals and acquired practical knowledge. A highlight was the visit to Agumbe – where they have placed trackers in King Cobras to study their movements."

"The only regret is that I don't get to leave the city as much as I would like to - and it's tough to get my parents to accompany me as they are not as crazy about exploring forests as I am. But I must say I am glad my parents are not like most others in India who are still wary about 'creepy crawlly' things and don't like their kids playing around with snakes and insects."

– Pranav Balasubramanian



Samyuktha



Kavya

Samyuktha and Kavya attended an international friendly meet, the Indian Youth Games, held in Malaysia.

Siblings Samyuktha and Kavya, both swimmers, attended an international friendly meet, the Indian Youth Games held in Malaysia during the summer holidays. "Other than the competition, which was fun of course, we made a lot of friends who promised to remain FFF- Face Book Friends Forever! The Malaysian girls are really fun and sportive. We got plenty of chances to get to know them and found that we have a whole lot of common interests and hobbies!" say the sisters in unison.

## CHILDREN (?) 14-18 YEARS

Mini adults that they are, youngsters in this age group often know their own interests and minds very well and tend to balk at parental suggestions. Which is why this section is addressed directly to them. Let your teen take over!

Say the words 'summer vacation' and our thoughts turn to long days spent lazing under the fan, mango juice dripping down our chins and a welcome break from the tyranny of schoolwork and exams. But after a few days of mindless enjoyment, your holiday starts to get – well, mindless. There are several ways you can spend your summer that can be fun and relaxing, and yet productive and helpful for your education. Check out some ideas given below:

### Interning

What is an internship? An internship is a work-related learning experience for those of you who wish to develop hands on work experience in a certain occupational field. Internships for high school students are not very common in India; but the concept is slowly catching on and, who knows, you might just be one of the few lucky people who spots an internship position and lands the job this summer.

For a start, you could check out [www.indianinternship.com](http://www.indianinternship.com), [www.india-interns.com](http://www.india-interns.com) and [www.hellointern.com](http://www.hellointern.com) – though bear in mind that these are geared towards college students. If you have a flair for writing, you can also check with your neighbourhood newspaper or local editions of large newspapers and magazines.

Another option you have is to intern with research institutions. There are a number of institutes across the country that do work in pure and applied as well in social sciences. Few of these have formal programmes for school students. As M. Vijaya Baskar of



### Useful Links

<http://www.internshipprograms.com/>  
<http://highschoolinternships.net>  
<http://www.internabroad.com/>  
<http://www.idealists.org/>  
<http://www.volunteerinternational.org/>  
[http://www.whatkidscando.org/resources/spec\\_summer.html](http://www.whatkidscando.org/resources/spec_summer.html)

### Research Institutions

Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore  
 Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore  
 Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai  
 Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi  
 Observer Research Foundation  
 TISS, Mumbai  
 IFMR, Chennai  
 CISED, Bangalore

Madras Institute of Development Studies explains, "It could be because internships for school students are still a new concept in India. If students are very enthusiastic, they should identify research institutes in their area of interest and write to the faculty there – this approach may open doors." Please see above for research institutions, including private-public undertakings and independent, not-for-profit initiatives.

For both research institutions and corporates, it may be a good idea to draft a proposal – this not only establishes that you are serious about interning, but also that you care enough to have done the ground work that goes into a project proposal. How does one draft a project proposal? See Box.

Do not be crestfallen if there is

only a month left before your summer break and not enough time to follow the structured approach detailed in the Box. You can still adapt the process and land an internship that maps to your needs and interests. For more specific pointers, do read Ms. Sandhya Koushika's (of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research) interview in the Perspectives section that follows.

A couple of important tips as we sign off on this section – it is not as much about the brand

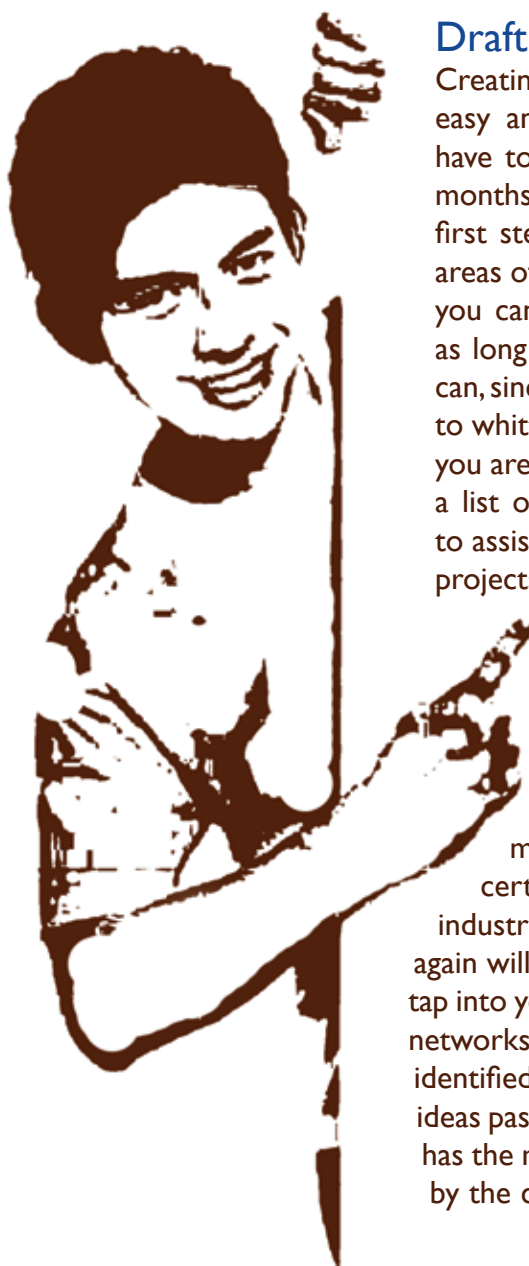
name of the company or research institute you are interning in, as much as the project you are working on. Ideally, the project should tie in with your interests and demonstrate your passion for the subject. Second, while paid internships are like a dream come true, places that both give you an internship and pay you are scarce. So, do prioritise learning to earning and take up opportunities that will help you enhance your knowledge.

## Drafting a project proposal

Creating a win-win proposal is not easy and will take time – you may have to start work on this a full six months or a year in advance. Your first step should be to identify your areas of interest and think of projects you can do in these areas. Draw up as long a list of such projects as you can, since you will most probably have to whittle them down. For example, if you are interested in biology, draw up a list of research projects you'd like to assist with – independent research projects in research institutes, in pharma companies, in biomedical start ups etc. If you are interested in business/economics, make a list of projects such as market research, economic modelling etc. Next, identify certain people who work in the industry/field of your interest; this again will take time, as you may have to tap into your parents'/relatives'/friends' networks to do this. Once you have identified these people, run your project ideas past them to see which they think has the most potential of being chosen by the company/institute you want to

work for. These contacts might also be able to point you in the direction of potential employers, or fine tune your project ideas to what is required in the field at the moment. Next, you should contact the company or institute you wish to work with and send them your proposal. Your proposal will either be accepted, or the organisation will come back with its own proposal of what it would like you to do. Or, you may not hear from the organisation at all – so, it is a good idea to have several irons in the fire!

Now, though we have written all the steps in one paragraph, it will become obvious to you as you begin the process, as to how long everything will actually take. Be sure to take help if necessary to draw up a concrete proposal, with a hypothesis, a detailed plan of action, and time lines, resources required (for travel, transportation, etc.) – this makes it easier for the organisation to accept your proposal, or tweak it to better suit their needs.



### Volunteering

If you are reading this, take a moment to acknowledge how privileged you are – you are fluent in English, you go to a good school in your city and have access to opportunities that many others can only dream about. You are also blessed with a long summer break where you are not burdened with the responsibility of making money or having to give up simple pursuits because your family cannot afford it. Why don't you try to give back something by volunteering your time and energy for a cause? As a young teen, you are at the perfect age to make a difference in the lives of underprivileged children, who would much rather enjoy the company of an energetic and empathetic bhaiyya or didi, than an older person. Check out the several child-focused NGOs in the country and pick one that appeals to you - Akanksha,

Pratham, Magic Bus, Doorstep Schools, Prerana, Mobile Creches, CORP and Vimla Vikas Kendra are some examples.

Here is another point for you to ponder over. While it is true that in our country one does not really need to leave one's home town to find opportunities for volunteering, summer may be a good time for you to get a taste of life in the rural areas. If you can handle the logistics, consider teaching in an anganwadi in your native village or volunteering at a rural hospital in a neighbouring state. Such experiences can give you insights into the very different cultures and beliefs that flourish there. Do read the experiences of Anupama G, Pratham Foundation (in the Perspectives section that follows) if, after reading this, you are contemplating a meaningful social contribution this summer.

### Travel with a purpose

Here we are referring to a trip that combines the fun and newness of travel with your interests, creating a journey that is far more memorable and interesting than a mere trip to a beach or a hill station. Are you passionate about saving the endangered flora and fauna that is threatened by manmade courses? You can perhaps make a trip to the Lakshadweep islands and study the coral reefs there. Interested in Engineering? Make a trip to one of the modern dams – Bhakra Nangal (Punjab-Haryana) or Nagarjuna Sagar (AP) to see how they work. Or go back in history and explore the Kallanai dam on the river Cauvery in Tamil Nadu – the oldest surviving dam in India, built in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Find out how they built this dam without any modern heavy machinery, and how it has survived almost two thousand years! If you are deeply proud of the rich history of India, use your trips within the country to visit the museums and heritage sites there – talk to the museum director and learn how they preserve their buildings and statues – maybe you can implement those ideas in part at least, at other neglected semi-historical structures nearby?

If a trip to an exotic island to study the endangered flora and fauna there sounds wonderful but far beyond your reach, you can consider many other equally interesting yet practical options: a trip to any of the states in India or, a backpacking trip in the Western Ghats or the Himalayas provide equally substantial opportunities to study nature in a breath-taking setting. What is important is that your trip ties in with your interests and passions – this way you will deepen your interest in your chosen subject or field, and also have made a memorable and productive trip that is educational in the true sense of the word.

### Learning through teaching

During their Grade Ten summer break, Nainika and Abhaya volunteered with the Hope Foundation to spend time with the children at a local school. From crossing barriers of language to stepping into the roles of teachers while shedding their own 'student' images, follow their attempts with the 'Byte sized technology' project at <http://hopefortomorrowworld.blogspot.in/>. The objective was to impart basic knowledge of computing – working with MS-Word, composing an e mail – to the students.

### “ To push one's limits - Bicycling solo

During my Grade 11 summer break, I decided to cycle from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. What I liked about the trip was that I found friends everywhere



Image Courtesy:  
Kalypso Adventures, Cochin

- I would have conversations with many different people on the road.

I had made arrangements to stay with friends en route, so it was not entirely exploratory. I hung up my boots at Cochin after six days and 760 kms. With the right precautions

- no speeding, avoiding early mornings and late nights - I ensured that the trip was uneventful.

- Sandeep Vinod

I was apprehensive about lonely roads, laden trucks and speeding buses on highways. But I did not voice my feelings as I also felt, "If he does not do this when he is in his teens, when else will he?"

- Sarah Vinod, Sandeep's mother

### Playing out your passion

With many years of exploration behind you, you now have several steady pursuits and passions. The summer break offers a window for you to delve deep and also produce something tangible. For example, playing the guitar has honed your musical skills, so why not attempt a composition as well? Dipika and Nikita had been pursuing theatre for many years when they got together with Mitra and Ragul, who had recently discovered the joys of theatre, to start their own theatre group over the summer break.

“Lights, camera, action!” Exciting words to hear, but even more exciting to say! Shashank and his friends grabbed the opportunity to learn how to film a documentary under the guidance of two experienced film makers. This is something the film-making enthusiasts had been waiting for – learning the processes of writing a script, manning a camera, making clips, doing interviews, taking notes, coordinating a shoot – by working in a real life situation. Shooting a documentary came with its own challenges of not having a script with firm boundaries, absence of a controlled studio environment and shooting on site at a manufacturing unit during odd hours - the youngsters learnt that film making is not all about the arc lights, but also about the work. There is no finer way to play out your passion than doing the 'tough and the boring' along with the fascinating.



### Passion tapped for a cause

Aparna Sekar has been pursuing dance from the time that she was in Grade Three; she shares, “I’ve always wanted to help people less privileged than I am, and I found that the best way I could do that was through dance - after all, spiritual health is just as important as physical health, and imbibing cultural values even as you’re being entertained is a great way to find peace.”

“About the performances that I did last summer, the one at Vellore was memorable as the majority of the audience comprised handicapped children. They really seemed to enjoy the recital and burst into spontaneous applause at the end! A recital in Visakhapatnam for a women’s empowerment group reaffirmed my belief that women can indeed do anything that they set their minds to, and I remember trying to channel this thought into my dance. I also did a few solos in Chennai as a part of a cultural programme for senior citizens and choreography with differently abled children from local schools.”

### Learning Life Skills

You are on the cusp of adulthood, and having been raised in a relatively sheltered environment until now, it may be worthwhile to experience certain aspects of life that are unfamiliar, new and perhaps even shocking. It is perhaps practically difficult to seek out such experiences, but here is one interesting instance:

During his Grade 12 break, Sandeep Vinod (yes, the one who took the solo bicycling trip), took a job at a car servicing centre. "It was actually my teacher's idea - I do not have much interest in cars," he narrates, "I found an opening in my father's friend's shop. Language was not a challenge, as the people who worked there spoke Tamil and Kannada. I was familiar with Tamil."

"There were some other challenges, though - The work day was 10 hours long and Sunday was a half-day working day too! I took Sundays 'off' and often wondered at the gruelling schedules the other mechanics kept. Also, the people that I worked with were very different from me; this took some time to get used to. I felt rather disturbed by the plight of a younger boy who was working there. He no longer went to school as his home situation not great. He had no choice but to be there, and here I was, just 'trying' out the experience."

"What did I learn? Well, I learnt to use tools; I also tried my hand at welding and spray painting. In fact, after this experience, I realised I loved tools - I did a series of projects that involved stone carving and

**Life lessons that Sandeep learnt**  
 "In school, the equation is different. If you do not like something, you can resist or not do it or not do it well and get away with it. Things change when you do things for money, like at a job."

Advice from Sandeep's father, "Learn what you want to learn and what you think is appropriate and ignore the rest."

wood carving tools. I also learnt about inter personal relationships, I understood the concept of pecking order. The chief mechanic would refuse to do anyone else's work while the servicing guy would not allow you to use the hose!"

While not everyone will be able to take a job like Sandeep did, you can perhaps spend time with your grandmother, picking up essential cooking skills or becoming self-sufficient by doing a few household chores. Some organisations such as Sri Sri Ravishankar's Art of Living offer structured courses that focus on self-awareness - check The Youth Empowerment Seminar (YES!) at <http://www.artofliving.org/youth-empowerment-seminar-yes>. You could also check with Chinmaya Yuva Kendra and other such organisations.





### **Enrichment Programmes Research Science Initiative**

This is a five-week summer programme at IIT Madras, that aims to nurture the spirit of enquiry in a non-exam centric environment.

35 select students from various schools participate in an intensive research programme under the guidance of professors from IIT-Madras and the Chennai Mathematical Institute.

### **Infosys Catch Them Young (CTY) Program**

This is a two-week program to initiate schoolchildren into Information Technology. Students from reputed educational institutions are selected through an entrance test. The shortlisted students undergo training in the basics of Computer Science and Programming. In addition, the students also participate in a soft-skills workshop, team-building sessions as well as quizzes and seminars to showcase their creativity and knowledge. At the end of the training, students are chosen to work on live projects.

### **Integrated Overnight Summer Camp for Children at Spastics Society of Karnataka**

This is a six-day (seven nights) camp for both children with disabilities and normal children aged 12-18 years. The expected outcomes: normal children will develop an understanding of the disabling conditions and its effect on children. They will be sensitised to respect the varying abilities of other children; this may help them build a relationship with a disabled person and empathise with him. Children with disabilities will have an opportunity to interact with normal children of their age and do similar activities together. They will also experience the way people, other than parents, family members and others in their immediate environment respond and react to their disabilities.

### **Evolve's Leadership Camp, Bangalore**

This is a 3-day residential camp for children aged 12 upwards. Conducted away from the bustle of the city, the camp allows participants to run the show, from planning, coordination and to its execution.

The highlights include Leading Lights (activity-based session on leadership skills), Jungle Gym (Breakthrough your fears), Trekking, Analysing the Leader in You (learn to give and receive feedback), Camp Fire, Physical and Mental Exercises.

*Interning, Volunteering, Travel with a Purpose, Playing your Passion to the hilt, Acquiring Life Skills and Enrichment Programmes – your summer certainly looks busy and interesting – does it not? In fact, you could apply some of these ideas during your shorter breaks too.*



Anupama Shekhar did her schooling in India and her college education in Singapore. After a stint with Citibank, Singapore, she moved to India, to be part of Pratham's social initiatives in rural India. Let us trace Anupama's journey into social initiatives.

## PERSPECTIVES

### On Volunteering for High Schoolers

#### **As a school student, how did you get involved in social initiatives?**

When I was in Grades Nine and Ten, our school adopted a government-run school close by. We students had to help those children with lessons. Looking back, I can sense that we did not accomplish much – but I see the value of that involvement now, as a grown up.

#### **So when did things become serious?**

When I was doing my undergraduate studies in Singapore Management University, as students, we undertook many community service projects. During one summer vacation, 14 of us came to Bangalore, as part of an initiative by World Habitat Foundation. We built houses for slum dwellers.

It was my interaction with the people there, especially with the children, that gave me the learning and eagerness to doing my bit for society.

#### **What was your biggest learning?**

That as youngsters growing up in typical families, we are sheltered and are not aware of the reality on-ground. Let me give you an example – in the slum that we were working in, there was a lane for Muslim families and one for Hindu families. Now, it is not that there were any tensions between the communities, but the clear distinction of

boundaries was something new to us. It was heartwarming, though, that children of both communities gelled well with us.

#### **How do you think volunteering helps school children?**

In the formative years, it is important for children to be exposed to nuances of society and its working. They become more sensitive, empathetic and aware. If a class of 30 is exposed to this, and 2-3 decide to take it up full-time, our country will benefit indeed.

#### **But are the highschoolers of today geared to handle the interactions with unfamiliar sections of society?**

Well, if the interactions happen in a facilitated environment, in the presence of responsible adults, yes, they can handle the uncertainties and surprises.

When high schoolers work with children from an under privileged background, they exhibit a lot of maturity – in some way, they feel they are being looked upon as role models (having access to more resources) and tend to be more controlled than usual!

#### **And what about parents?**

Parents of today are a lot more aware of the benefits of such experiences. They no longer ask questions like, “How will this contribute to their academic performance?”

Anupama is one of the founders of Paradigm School Network – through a Bangalore-based NGO, they have set up a network of eight schools in Bangalore that are open for adoption by students of schools in Singapore and the USA. Students of both the adopted and adoptee school benefit from exchange of ideas and communication, while the adoptee school gains resources. Do look up [www.paradigmschoolnetwork.org](http://www.paradigmschoolnetwork.org) and express your interest – Paradigm will find a way to involve you!





Dr. Sandhya P Koushika of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bangalore, is a veteran of sorts when it comes to working with high school children – she has provided many opportunities for them to get a flavour of what it is to be part of a research environment.

## On Research Internships for High Schoolers

### How relevant are internships, at school level, for careers in India?

While students who pursue the IB curriculum seek out internships regularly, the concept is rather new to students in Indian boards like CBSE or ICSE. But rather than looking at internships as a way to enhance his resume value, the student should use this opportunity to gauge his inclination for the subject. Internships give a chance to test out one's passion and interest and can help a student to decide his future career path.

Internships are also a good way to get a taste of actual work life. For example, research may seem very glamorous from the outside, but there is grunt work to be done (like any other profession). One may think people skills are not very important, that one works by himself, but in research also, one has to deal with other human beings all the time!

Internships can be quite a transforming experience because of all these reasons, and are hence relevant for students who wish to continue their higher education in India too.

### What is the approach that high schoolers should take to find internship opportunities?

Word of mouth is the only effective medium at present – parents can tap into their contact network and come up with a few suggestions. But beyond that, the process has to be 'owned' by the high schooler. He has to draft a statement of intent or purpose about his interests and inclinations and possible areas that he can contribute in and then meet up with senior researchers.

Speaking on behalf of the academic community, we need to know if the student is genuinely interested or is being pushed by the parent. By showing involvement, as detailed above, a student can establish his keenness and initiative.

### What about students whose parents do not have any contacts in academia?

Students could take the assistance of their schools or school teachers. Also, they could contact institutes of higher education in their cities.

### Your word of caution

Not all research institutes will be open to taking in youngsters. The duration of internship is fairly short (around two months); this combined with the student's limited knowledge of the subject and negligible experience means that they cannot be assigned something which is part of a mission-critical project.

Most researchers are very busy and may be unwilling to spare the time to engage with a youngster. Again, not all are able to do the tight rope walk of managing a youngster and getting the best out of him while not hurting or damaging his self-esteem.

### What, according to you, should be the role of the parent?

Specifically in the context of the internship, parents should let the 'child be' – provide necessary support for transport and other logistical issues, and be available for any help. They should refrain from micromanaging. The student has to make the internship happen, by convincing the relevant people, and also make it a success by being sincere, dedicated and regular in his work.

However, parents can definitely play a role in instilling good work habits in their children. They could help them develop a daily work routine and a mind-set that is akin to preparing for a marathon – steady pace of work rather than a rush just before the exams.

If one wants to be a good singer or sports person, one needs to do the same thing over and over again – if parents can prep their children, before interning, on this approach, it will definitely help. ■■■