



WELCOME TO *THE HEALTHY BUZZ*

Advocates for Healthy Kids is here to cut through the noise and bring parents the practical, balanced information they need to raise strong, healthy families. From real-life nutrition tips to clear breakdowns of hot-button health topics, this newsletter delivers resources, ideas, and encouragement — so you can stay confident in the most important role you'll ever have: **being your child's greatest advocate.**

A NOTE FROM DR. DUNNAVANT



Dear Friends,

As summer starts to wind down, your family rhythm is about to shift. The days are getting a little shorter, the back-to-school displays are creeping into stores, and families everywhere are starting to feel the familiar pull toward a new season.

In the middle of all that transition, it can be easy to second-guess yourself. With so many opinions and competing voices out there, I am here to remind you not to forget that no one knows your children better than you do.

Whether it's choosing how they spend their time or what they eat, parents deserve the space to make decisions that fit their own families. Research consistently shows that children thrive when the adults raising them feel confident and supported. That confidence builds trust, stability, and a deep sense of belonging that no outside voice can replicate.

That's exactly why we're here. Advocates for Healthy Kids exists to be a resource for parents — a place to find trustworthy information, real support, and a community that believes YOU are the expert on your own family.

As you navigate these final weeks of summer and start thinking about what fall looks like for your family, take a moment to recognize the choices you make every single day because they matter enormously. When parents lead with intention, kids learn to do the same.

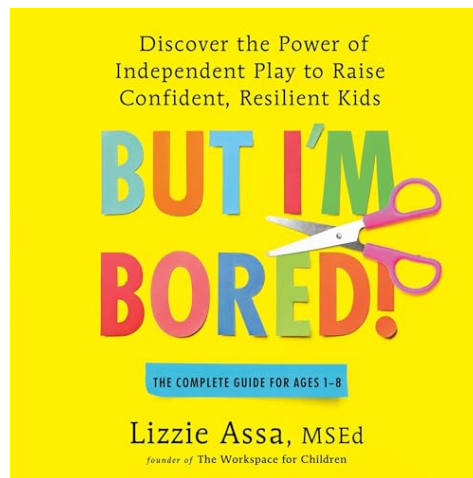
Thank you for being part of a community that believes in empowering families to make decisions rooted in love, not pressure.

Warmly,

Siobhan Dunnavant, MD

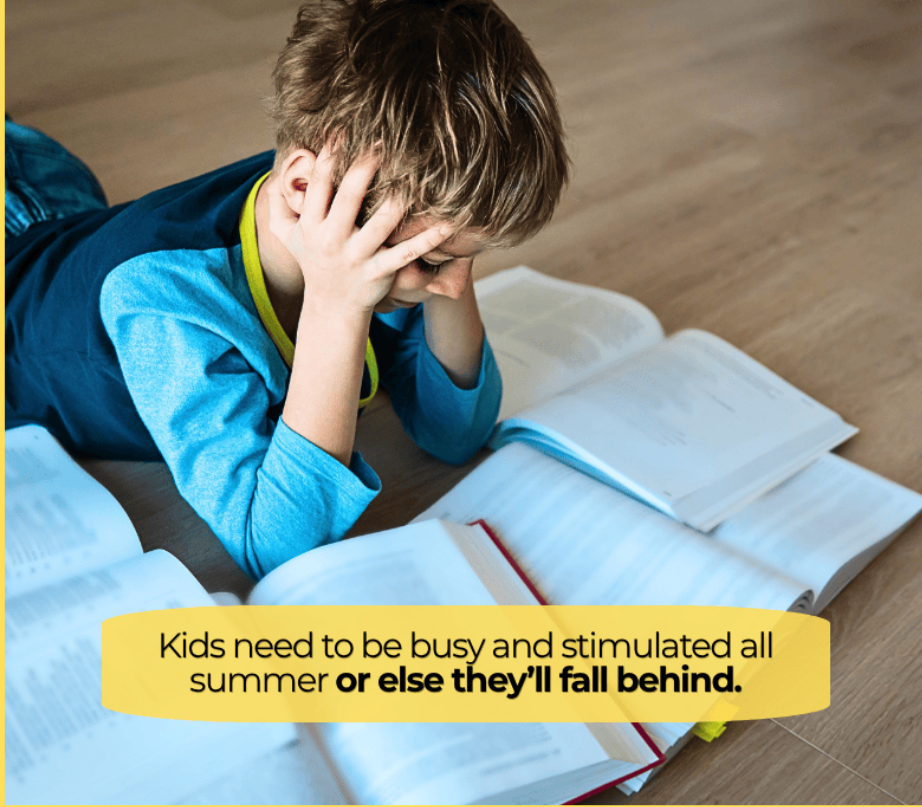
Senior Advisor, Advocates for Healthy Kids

*P.S. — There's still time to join our Summer Book Club! [But I'm Bored! by Lizzie Assa](#) is a quick, feel-good read perfect for these last few weeks of summer. [Follow along on Instagram](#) and join the conversation at **#AHKBookClub**.*



FACT OR MYTH?

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Kids need to be busy and stimulated all summer **or else they'll fall behind.**

Keep up the conversation!

Follow us [@adv4healthykids](https://twitter.com/adv4healthykids) for useful tips, clear breakdowns on hot-button issues, and encouragement to stay empowered and confident in your role as a key part of your child's growth.

ADVOCACY
ACTION



Skip the 'How Was Your Day'



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When you sit down to dinner with your kids after a busy day, try these easy, open-ended questions to get the conversation going:

QUESTION: *"What's something that happened today that surprised you?"*

Low pressure, no right or wrong answer, and it gets them thinking beyond just "it was fine."

QUESTION: *"Who did you sit with at lunch and what did you talk about?"*

Grounds the conversation in something specific and social without feeling like an interrogation.

QUESTION: *"What's something you're hoping tomorrow looks like?"*

Ends on a forward-looking, positive note and gives you a window into what they're excited about or anxious about heading into the next day.

THE LATEST

Social Media Isn't Going Away... Raise a Kid Who Can Handle It

Some families who've tried an outright ban know how it usually ends once your child reaches a certain age. The ban creates friction, the friction creates secrecy, and the secrecy creates something far more concerning than a TikTok account you know about.

Technology is woven into daily life. The question was never really if your child would grow up with it, but how. And that depends almost entirely on what habits you help them build now.

Scrolling vs. Using

Not all screen time is the same, and the research makes that clear.

A [2024 meta-analysis of 141 studies](#) found that passive use (mindless scrolling) is consistently linked to lower wellbeing in adolescents. Active, purposeful use like direct communication, creative projects, educational content, or learning a skill shows far weaker negative effects. In some cases, none at all.

The screen isn't the problem. What's on it, and why your child is reaching for it, is what matters.

What Good Tech Habits Look Like

The goal isn't to monitor every app. It's to help shape your child's relationship with technology early, so they carry those instincts with them even when you're not in the room.

A few things that work:

- **Name the difference.** Talk to your kids about the difference between using tech with a purpose (looking something up, watching a tutorial, staying in touch with a friend) versus reaching for a phone out of boredom or habit. Kids who can name that distinction start making the choice consciously.
- **Make purposeful use the default.** When your child wants screen time, orient it toward something. A documentary. A how-to video. A creative tool. Educational platforms or content tied to their interests can make screens feel like a resource rather than a reward.
- **Keep bedrooms screen-free at night.** This one is simple and [well-supported by research](#). A charging station in a common area removes the temptation without requiring daily negotiation.
- **Teach Them to Read the Feed.** The single most durable skill you can give a child navigating tech isn't a rule. It's a foundation for how they'll look at technology the rest of their life.

Help them understand that what shows up in their feed isn't random. It's engineered to keep them watching. That content designed to make them angry or anxious spreads faster than content that makes them think. That most of what they see on social media is a highlight reel, not real life.

Kids who understand how it really works are far less likely to be used by it.

Technology is not going away. Managed well, it can be a genuine tool for learning, creativity, and connection. Managed poorly, it crowds out sleep, movement, and the real-life relationships that matter most.

The parents who shape that outcome aren't the ones with the strictest rules. They're the ones who stay involved and help their kids build the instincts to know the difference long before they're navigating it on their own.

The Summer Slide Isn't Just Academic: What Happens to Kids' Health When Routines Disappear

Every August, teachers brace for it. The math skills that softened. The reading fluency that slipped. The collective reset that happens when kids spend ten weeks outside the structure of a school day.

But the summer slide doesn't just happen in academics. It shows up in sleep patterns, eating habits, screen time, and the slow unraveling of the health routines that kept kids feeling their best all year.

By mid-July, a lot of families look around and realize that bedtime has crept two hours later and vegetables have largely disappeared from the menu. Some loosening is fine. But a few things shouldn't drift too far.

Sleep: The First Thing to Go

Ask any parent what changes first when school lets out and the answer is almost always sleep.

The logic feels reasonable because no early alarm means no real bedtime. A few late nights turn into a new normal, and before long kids are staying up way later than they would during the school year.

The problem is children's bodies don't actually adapt to that shift as smoothly as it seems. The [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#) recommends that school-age children (6-12) get 9 to 12 hours of sleep per night, and [teenagers \(13-18\)](#) need 8 to 10. Those numbers don't change in July.

What changes is quality and consistency. Irregular sleep timing, even when total hours are adequate, disrupts the body's circadian rhythm in ways that affect mood, appetite regulation, immune function, and the ability to concentrate.

[Research published in Scientific Reports](#) tracked adolescents over two years and found that healthy sleep patterns (sufficient hours, earlier timing, fewer nighttime wakings) were consistently linked to lower rates of depression and anxiety. When sleep patterns worsened, mental health declined alongside them. How and when kids sleep matters as much as how long.

Re-establishing a school-year schedule in late August is genuinely hard. The longer the drift, the more uncomfortable that correction becomes.

Screen Time: The Slow Creep

During the school year, screens have natural governors. School hours, homework, sports, bedtime. Structure limits access without parents having to fight about it.

Summer removes those guardrails. Without them, screen time expands to fill every available

gap.

Not all of that time is equal, though. [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) even moved away from setting a hard daily hour limit and toward a bigger question: what is your child actually doing on a screen? A kid working through a math program or reading on a tablet is doing something fundamentally different than one who's been passively scrolling for two hours.

So if your child is using screens over the summer to stay sharp by working on reading, practicing math, or learning something new, that's worth something. The concern is the mindless scrolling and the bingeing that fills the gaps when nothing else is there.

Screens aren't the enemy. But summer is when limits matter most, because nothing else is enforcing them.

Eating Habits: What Happens Without the Bell

School, for all its imperfections, is a surprisingly reliable eating schedule. Breakfast before the bus. Lunch at noon. Dinner at a reasonable hour. The rhythm is built in.

Summer has a tendency to blow that up. Meals blur into snacks. Kids sleep through breakfast, eat lunch at 2 p.m., and aren't hungry for dinner. The easy options become the default, and a few weeks of that adds up.

[A 2025 study in BMC Public Health](#) tracked over 1,000 children across three summers and found that kids were consistently less likely to eat fruit, vegetables, and dairy during summer than during the school year, and more likely to reach for soda, fast food, and frozen desserts. The culprit wasn't the kids. It was the absence of structure. When school provides the schedule, the eating generally follows. When it doesn't, whatever's easiest typically fills the gap.

The fix isn't a perfect meal plan. Keep regular mealtimes as anchors, make fruit and vegetables easy to grab, and stay honest about how much the food environment shifts when school is out.

Physical Activity: From Daily PE to the Couch

During the school year, movement is baked in. Recess, PE, walking the hallways, carrying a backpack. It's not all rigorous, but it adds up.

Summer removes that baseline. For kids not in sports or camps, the drop in daily movement can be significant.

[The CDC recommends](#) at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day for children ages 6 to 17. A lot of kids fall short of that over the summer, and it shows up

at back-to-school physicals through weight changes, reduced cardiovascular fitness, and deconditioning that takes weeks to reverse.

The Mid-Summer Check-In

Most families schedule their child's annual well visit right before school starts, which makes sense, except that by late August, the summer has already happened. Whatever slipped has been slipping for months.

A mid-summer conversation with your pediatrician, even a quick one, lets you flag what you're noticing before it becomes a pattern. A child whose sleep has been off for six weeks. A teenager whose mood has shifted. A kid who hasn't moved much since June.

Your pediatrician is also a useful ally when kids push back. "The doctor said" sometimes carries more weight than "because I said so," and there's nothing wrong with using that.

Some things to consider bringing up:

- Has my child's sleep schedule shifted significantly, and is that a concern?
- My child has been less active than usual. What's a reasonable baseline to work toward?
- Is there anything I should be doing now to make the back-to-school transition easier on their body?

Keeping the Summer Without Losing the Structure

The goal isn't to turn summer into a second school year. Unstructured time matters (boredom is genuinely good for kids) and the long, slow days are part of what makes summer, summer.

But there's a difference between protecting unstructured time and letting all structure dissolve.

A few things that tend to hold it together without turning it into a schedule:

- **Sleep windows over strict bedtimes.** Thirty to sixty minutes later is fine. Two to three hours is where the real problem starts and where the correction in August gets painful.
- **One screen-free stretch a day.** It doesn't need to be long. A few hours without devices naturally opens up the time and space kids need to move, play, and get bored.
- **Mealtimes as events, not suggestions.** They don't have to be precise. But breakfast, lunch, and dinner should feel like meals — not just moments in a day of continuous grazing.
- **Daily movement, nonnegotiable.** It doesn't have to be organized. A walk, throwing a ball in the backyard, jumping in the pool. Something that gets them off the couch every day regardless of what else is happening.

Summer Should Feel Different — But Not Like a Free Fall

Kids need the break. The slower mornings, the room to just be.

But their bodies still need sleep. Their brains still need movement and real food and limits on the things that displace those essentials.

But they still need sleep. They still need to move and eat and put down the phone. The families that come out of summer in good shape aren't the ones who scheduled every hour. They're the ones who kept a few things steady and let the rest breathe.

And if you're reading this realizing some of those things have already slipped? It's not too late. Summer isn't over yet!

HOMEMADE PIZZA NIGHT!

The dinner that gets everyone to the table AND travels to the pool the next day.

An easy win-win: no complicated prep and no complaints! This comes together in about 20 minutes and somehow puts everyone in a good mood by the time it comes out of the oven. Let the kids stretch their own dough, pick their toppings, and take credit for dinner. By the time you sit down, the hard part of the day is already behind you. And the leftovers? Wrap a couple of slices, and you've got an easy meal to bring to the pool the next day!



[DOWNLOAD TO SAVE THIS RECIPE FOR LATER](#)

ENGAGE WITH US

What is your favorite food that you and your child prep & cook together?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

KEEP IN TOUCH

Follow Advocates for Healthy Kids for quick tips, fun updates, and real talk from fellow parents and our founder, Dr. Dunnavant. Get involved and help us keep our children safe and healthy!



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