



What Do American Teenagers Do in the Summer?

By Kathryn M. Napper



Some U.S. teenagers find cool summer jobs like this one, scooping ice cream. Others work outside, taking care of lawns or working as camp counselors. ©AP Images

“One popular summer activity for American teenagers is employment.”

Teenagers in the United States are involved in many summer activities—part-time jobs and internships, college courses, summer camp, community service and pursuing personal interests.

The school year for U.S. students generally lasts 9½ months—from late August or early September to middle or late June. This gives

teenagers a summer break of about 2½ months to pursue activities that are meaningful to them.

The anticipation of summer begins before the final frost melts, the daffodils sprout or the last exam is completed. Younger students may dream of playing outside with friends, vacationing with families and having fun. Summer also means warm

weather, backyard barbecues, Independence Day celebrations and freedom from schoolwork and homework.

Loftier Goals

As students become teenagers and enter high school, the anticipation of summer turns toward loftier goals. These may include

activities that supplement their high school work, projects that provide personal growth and experience, opportunities to earn money and experiences that offer broader perspectives for college.

One popular summer activity for American teenagers is employment. The summer provides a wonderful opportunity to earn spending money, as many types of part-time jobs often are available. Among them are babysitting, waiting tables at local restaurants, being lifeguards at neighborhood swimming pools or providing lawn care services. Sometimes a summer job is one that was held during the school year, or it is a job the teenager repeats every summer.

Work experience can be gained in an internship. A student may volunteer with an organization or business to acquire experience for and understanding about career opportunities related to their interests. Students pursue internships to learn about non-profit organizations, legal professions or the inner

workings of major companies. Internships are valuable tools to help teenagers begin to think about possible majors in college or their post-college endeavors.

Teenagers also use the summer to explore academic interests. A number of U.S. colleges offer summer courses for high school students. Some of these experiences, particularly longer ones, allow the teenager to earn college credit. For example, a student could take a course that shows political theory in action at a university in Washington, a cinema course at a college in Hollywood or a cooking class at a culinary school in New York City.

Personal Pursuits

Summer camp is also popular among American teenagers. Camps can be related to interests or hobbies, such as sports or performing arts, or they may be “sleep-away” camps, where the teenager lives. Sleep-away camps provide many activities and opportunities to develop friendships. Older teenagers often work at these camps as a counselors—the ones responsible for planning and running the activities.

Many American students have strong interests in community service, and summer allows them to offer their time or talents to service organizations. These activities may include volunteering at a shelter for people who are homeless, at a hospital or at a “soup kitchen” that serves free meals. Some teenagers may travel to less developed areas

of the world to help build houses or provide other services.

Finally, summer offers teenagers the chance to pursue their own interests and passions, to read, to take up a new hobby, to exercise, to go to the beach, to travel or to develop new skills. Summer allows for the pursuit of interests that, because of the demands of schoolwork, are more difficult to accomplish during the school year. Regardless of their choices, most American teenagers want to enjoy the break—and pursue meaningful activities.

Kathryn Napper is associate vice president and dean of admissions at The George Washington University in Washington. As a college administrator for more than 30 years, she has watched thousands of American teenagers grow into young adults. *Ken White/State Department*

