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Learning, the not-so-hard way for Bangalore children

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With summer and vacations upon us, harried parents are busy picking the right summer courses and camps that will keep their children occupied, if not interested. There are plenty to choose from and here's a few that promise to teach something unusual, and to a great degree useful, to children.

What about learning to become a magician? With the last of the Harry Potter movie slated to be released in India at the end of this summer, it's time the young Pottermaniacs learnt some spells that leave the Muggles amazed. Magicians and corporate entertainers Nakul Shenoy and Prahlad Acharya have five-day workshops in store, at Rs1,500 per child.

Slated tentatively for the third week of May onwards, these workshops will be held at The Magic Space. Shenoy and Acharya will train children in the basics of magic — the know-how, tricks and tools of the trade — to further their interest in it and enable them to hold a short show of their own.

These workshops are usually meant for children above 10 years of age. "Smaller children cannot concentrate and learn. It's better for the parents to buy them a starter's kit with DVDs, instead of wasting money enrolling the child in a course he or she may not be suited for," says Shenoy.

He explains that a course in magic does more than just help a child become an entertainer. "It helps children become more confident; it helps them get over their shyness or diffidence. They know something unusual that others don't. They know magic. That gives a major confidence boost."

Then, there's a creative thinking workshop by Sparkling Mindz. This aims to impart "thinking skills" to children. There are two age groups: 5-7 years and 8-13 years and the workshop is held for about two hours each day, for five days.

"We teach children various creative-thinking tools, assumption busting, brainstorming, lateral thinking — they are taught to think out of the box. This is done through games, role-plays and hands on application as well," says Sreeja Iyer, founder of Sparkling Mindz.

"The objective is to help children think creatively about solving real problems. So the application part of it relates to learning a very difficult subject or a very boring one at school and how one can get over the difficulties by thinking differently. Or, it may be a situation of being bullied. Children come up with 10 or 15 ways of dealing with these problems by the end of the workshop," says Iyer.

Iyer, 29, an engineer, is a NLP-certified professional and holds a business degree from Indian School of Business. She incorporates some of the Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques into workshops too. At around Rs1,500 to Rs1,800 per child, these workshops have found a tremendous response amongst parents.

"This helps children overcome learning barriers. They become confident speakers as they learn creative expressions for public speaking and parents do come back to us and report a noticeable change in children at the end of five days," says Iyer. Sparkling Mindz has

workshops scheduled through May and June.