
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Balancing your child's activity schedule



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

The start of a new school year is often the start of a new season of extracurricular activities.

There are many positive benefits of activities and classes for children. Participating in group or skills-based activities can help them identify areas of interest, improve social abilities and teach skills that benefit children as they grow. After-school programs can also help improve academics or ensure that students get physical activity.

Early childhood experts say that participating in activities positive. But too many activities can result in an overscheduled child, which can have a negative impact.

Are your kids over scheduled?

The right level of activity depends on the child. Concerns about overscheduling children have been raised among child development experts, but it may not be as big a problem as you think. According to WebMD Health News, "A group of leading child development experts is challenging the popular notion that kids engage in too many organized activities, and that the pressures of overscheduling are leading to substance abuse and other developmental problems.

"Rather than spending too much time participating in organized activities, most kids don't spend enough, they say. Around 40% don't participate in organized sports or other organized activities at all."
www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20060814/kids-arent-overscheduled

For some kids, overscheduling is a real problem, but these health experts have round research indicating that it isn't widespread. Research led by Joseph L. Mahoney, PhD, of Yale University found the following:

The average youth (aged 5-18) spends about 5 hours a week participating in organized activities, compared with around 15 hours watching television.

Only about 6% of adolescents aged 12-18 spend 20 hours or more a week engaged in organized activities.

Kids and teens tend to participate in organized activities because they want to. Pressure from parents, coaches, or other adults is seldom given as their reason for joining in.

Your child may be overscheduled if...

Although overscheduling may not be as big a problem as we thought, parents should evaluate activity calendars on a kid-by-kid basis. Your child may be too busy if they:

- feel tired, anxious or depressed

(Over)

- complain of headaches, stomachaches, which may be signs of stress, missed meals or inadequate sleep
- fall behind in schoolwork and/or have lower school performance

The key is to pay attention to each child. Some kids thrive when they are busiest, and many children with busy schedules are actually the driving force for all of their activities – their parents are simply signing them up for the activities they want to do.

The downside of too many activities

Researchers have found that a larger concern about heavily scheduled children is the stress parents feel in trying to manage work and packed activity schedules. Kids will likely feel this stress. Children pick up on stress levels when parents are overwhelmed.

“The stress of trying to be everywhere and do everything permeates parents’ lives and affects them just as much as children. In fact, research shows that families trying to maintain this type of schedule tend to have increased anxiety-related disorders and depression, in both children and parents,” said Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld, author of *The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap*. Rosenfeld tells parents to take their cues from their kids. After exposing them to a variety of activities, let them choose one or two to explore further. www.education.com/magazine/article/Benefits_Underscheduling_Child/

Finding a balance

Kidshealth.com offers these tips for setting reasonable limits on kids’ activities:

- **Agree on ground rules ahead of time.** Set limits on the number of activities or days per week.
- **Know how much time is required.** Account for practice and games or concerts.
- **Keep a calendar to stay organized.** Display where all family members can see it.
- **Even if kids sign up for the season, let them miss one or two sessions.** Teaching dedication and commitment are important, but it’s not the end of the world if something comes up.
- Try to carpool. Sharing responsibilities with other parents can make life easier and help children reinforce friendships outside of the activity.
- **Try to balance activities for all of your kids — and yourself.** Use fairness as a guide when signing children up for activities. Be sure that one child isn’t prioritized over another. Be sure you don’t prioritize your children’s activities over your own needs. Say no if your schedule is becoming too stressful.
- **Create family time.** Preserve time without other commitments to reconnect as a family.
- **Set priorities.** School should come first. Drop an activity if grades start to drop.
- **Know when to say no.** Evaluate your child’s schedule before agreeing to add another activity.
- **Remember the importance of downtime.** Everyone needs a chance to relax and do nothing.

http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/child_too_busy.html#

Participating in activities is healthy for children, but it is important to balance healthy participation with the need to minimize stress. Choose activities carefully to maintain your health and find the right balance for your children.