

Counselor's Corner

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Lots of Enrichment Activities: Good or Bad?

It is important to strike a healthy balance between enrichment activities and downtime at home. Could your family be over-committed? It happens easily. One big culprit is extra-curricular kid activities. It used to be a child would play a sport or perhaps play the piano. Nowadays it seems he plays one, maybe two sports per season, takes piano and belongs to boy scouts. If you have more than one child in the family, you can times that by two or three and you have a recipe for an over-committed family.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with playing sports, taking music or dance, or participating in scouts. Each of these activities is wonderful and enriches a child's life tremendously. A compelling argument can be made for the value of every single activity, but when the schedule eliminates family meals, family together-time, or simply all available down-time, then there's a problem. Kids need enough unstructured time for creative pursuits to emerge and thrive. They need time to simply hang out at home and amuse themselves in non-electronic ways - things like reading, drawing, building forts, playing with toys, making comic books and putting on puppet shows.

Sufficient time at home is also necessary for homework and chores. Helping around the house and yard are pretty much the only practical ways children have of contributing to the ongoing welfare of the family; it's an important part of their development.

So what do you do when you realize that the extra-curricular activities have gotten out of hand? It helps to do some prioritizing says psychologist Harriet Heath, Ph.D., and author of [*Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*](#). Heath points out that simply identifying values for your family isn't enough. You must prioritize them and then integrate them into your parenting. If creativity is high on your list, then more time at home may be appropriate. If being physically active is high on your list, you will naturally lean more toward having your children in sports or other physical activities. Finding that good balance of outside activities and time at home will reduce stress for all family members.

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