"I'll Pencil You In" — The Overscheduled Child

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Introduction

In a world where being busy is the norm for most individuals, today's children are no exception. In addition to school, children have a multitude of extracurricular activities and are often jumping from one activity to another. Many parents feel that they should keep their child(ren) involved in activities, and doing so will keep them out of trouble. However, an over-worked, over-stressed child may face alternative problems versus one who has nothing to do.

A child's after school weekly schedule may look like the following:

- Monday- Karate
- Tuesday- Music lessons
- Wednesday- Dance
- Thursday- Voice lessons
- Friday- Youth group
- Saturday- Basketball

As full as it appears, this schedule does not include hours of practice needed for each activity. Nor does it include school, homework, family time, or down time. So, with schedules such as this, one question remains: "Are our children overbooked?"

Research has shown that children involved in extra-curricular activities are less likely to be involved in risky behavior and have higher motivation for achievement. However, some children are over-involved in activities and may experience stress, anxiety, and burnout. Parents must intervene and help their children regulate activity involvement and break time to enjoy childhood.

Breaking Point: When Enough is Enough

How do parents recognize that their child is over-scheduled? Research has shown that increases in daily activities lead to higher levels of stress. Bouncing from one activity to another has left many children overwhelmed, stressed, and tired. Here are some questions to ask, to determine whether a child is overscheduled:

- Does the child go from one activity to another with little or no enthusiasm?
• Is the child having trouble sleeping at night?
• Does the child complain of not having enough
time to spend with their friends?
• Is the phrase “hurry up or we'll be late” used
excessively?
• When did the child last participate in
“quality” family time?
• Does your child have time to explore different
interests (other than activities) that they may
have?

Answering these questions can determine
whether a child is over-scheduled, and if he or she is
just following a routine their parents have set forth.

Research has shown an overbooked child leads
to a less active teenager. Simply put, over-scheduled
children become burned out later in life. Research
also suggests that children who have played a sport
with intensity for an extended period of time
eventually tire of the activity as it becomes routine
and just something to pass time, while the love of the
sport is lost. The problem with these children is the
vast number of activities replaces the experience they
have with each. It becomes a struggle between
quantity and quality. After burnout, children lose the
desire to participate in other activities during later
adolescent years and may become idle.

Tips for Keeping a Child Active but
Not Over-scheduled

Reduce the amount of activities

Have the child choose a few activities that
interests him. Researchers suggest a child pick one
sport event, one social activity, and one artistic
activity (Kirchheimer, 2004). If he or she really
enjoys more than one sport, encourage choosing
seasonal sports, which provide alternating schedules.
Social activities, such as Boy/Girl Scouts or 4-H,
provide constant interaction with peers. This constant
interaction offers a stable social community, which is
positive for child development. Lastly, the artistic
components foster creativity and mental exercise.

Increase family time

Family is an essential foundation for the healthy
development of a child, but overscheduling
encroaches on family time due to conflicting
schedules and lack of downtime. Like adults, children
need the opportunity to relax. After work and school,
afternoon and evening activities begin. For most
families, time spent together occurs during car rides
home or from getting ready for one activity and
moving to another. So instead of enrolling your child
in a second or third organized activity, try putting a
family meal on the schedule.

Cheer, not criticize

Parents are guilty of yelling at their child to make
the goal, catch the ball, and shoot the basket. What
they do not realize is the immense pressure they are
putting on the child. Instead of yelling at them to do
something, encouraging the child to have fun or
congratulating them is more beneficial. Children
complain that the parent yelling puts them in a
position of not wanting to disappoint their parent.
Parents can step back and ask themselves how they
would like it if their boss were constantly yelling at
them to turn that report in or win that case.

Conclusion

Overall, parents have to let their children be
children. Over-scheduling a child can have an
adverse affect in the long run. While the research
says extracurricular activities provide a positive outlet
for children and lower the likelihood of risky
behavior, over-scheduling a child introduces other
stress factors that might potentially lead to a
burned-out child.

Online Resources

Is Your Child Too Busy?
http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth/growing/
child_too_busy.html

many activities can affect family life. Colorado State
University Extension.
http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columncc/
cc030325.html
Additional Resources


References