

Tips for Parents: Balance School, Family Time

Fielding remarks such as “What do you mean, Jack’s not joining the team?” need not prompt a parental guilt trip.

Although school and community activities are many, reclaiming family time can strengthen the family as a unit and add value to family life and any extras parents and children may choose. Making choices is key, if parents and children are overcommitted to a seemingly endless line of activities, the family—and each of its members—will suffer from the stress.

Exhaustion isn’t conducive to learning. Neither is having a mother or father who is frazzled from running children back and forth from one activity to another. The following are tips for reclaiming family time and balancing school, family, work and community:

- Declare (at least) one night a week family night. Make it a pizza, movie or game night, or a time to cook together, do a project, play a pick-up game, go for a walk or ride bikes. Relax, and be flexible.
- Encourage children to bring their friends home, stay for supper or join a family activity. While a child can be happy to have a friend included, his or her family also can get better acquainted with the child’s friends.
- Share family responsibilities. Get the children involved in sorting laundry, setting the table, cooking, cleaning or yard work to free up time for the family. Accept that a child might not complete the task as you would. Remember that learning to work as a team and accepting responsibility is a valuable lesson in life and likely to be more important than a perfect fold on towels or T-shirts.
- Consider a child’s age and interests, rather than your own, before choosing an activity. Feeling that you missed an opportunity, such as piano lessons or a chance to play in the band, is not a reason to assume that your child will embrace it.
- If considering an after-school or extracurricular activity, consider the time commitment for the child and others in the family. Is transportation available? How many practices will be scheduled each week? Will they be after school? In the evening? On weekends?
- Consider the total cost of an activity. Is it possible to rent a band instrument? Buy used, rather than new? What do basketball shoes cost? How much will it cost to travel to and from practices or home and away games?

- Designate a family calendar and post it in a place where entries can be made easily and schedules checked regularly.
- Enter school schedules such as vacation and in-service dates as soon as they become available to avoid double-booking or a last-minute scramble to schedule childcare.
- Try not to feel pressured. Think of downtime as time to recharge your batteries.
- Be willing to say, “This isn’t working,” and to make changes, as needed, to balance family life, school and community activities and reduce stress.

Families typically have ups and downs. Establishing priorities can, however, be helpful in reducing stresses.

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