

# Is Parental Fear of Boredom Overworking Kids?

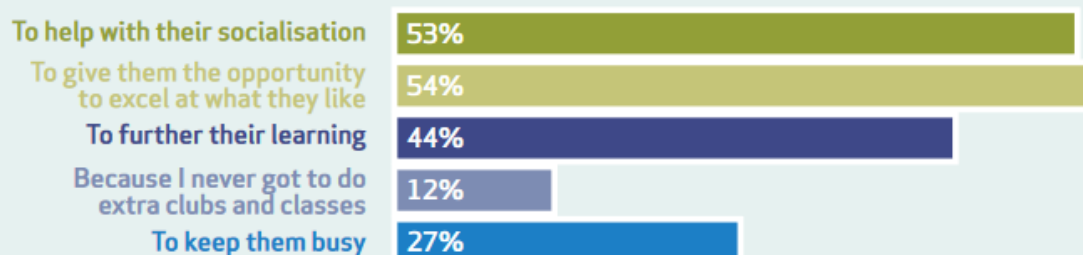
Growing up, I knew better than to utter those two infamous words of childhood: “I’m bored.” The reason I rarely uttered them was because I knew that my mother would immediately find some type of chore to “entertain” me with.

Today’s kids rarely utter the “I’m bored” phrase either. Only their reason for not doing so is much different than mine. You see, today’s kids are rarely ever bored because their free time is chewed up by carpooling, soccer games, ballet practice, and any number of other activities which parents now seem to believe are a normal part of childhood.

According to a [new study](#) out of the U.K., these activities are often promoted by parents with the best of intentions (see chart), but often end up exhausting their children by making them “work” more hours a week than dad and mom:

*“[P]rimary school aged children – aged between four and 11 – are now ‘working’ -either in school or through scheduled activities – for up to 46 hours a week, nine hours more than the UK adult average of 37 hours.”*

Fig 1: Why parents put their children in extra classes



This “overscheduled” phenomenon, instead of being the helpful time of learning that parents intend, may actually be detrimental to children, particularly if parents allow them to spend their small amount of free time in front of a screen. As Dr. Sam Wass, the psychologist in charge of the study explains:

*“[R]esearch suggests that, rather than constant, adult-led cramming, it’s much more beneficial for children if their time is not always so structured. In fact, it’s the down-time, when there is not so much going on and the child has to entertain themselves, when they do their best learning. There is a huge amount of research that suggests that this child-led, unstructured free play is vital for stimulating imagination and creativity, as well as helping the child to become more self-sufficient.”*

In the last several decades, extra-curricular activities have played a huge role in the life of the average American child – and for that matter, the average American family forced to restructure life around those activities. Is it possible that such a practice has not only diminished family growth and cohesion, but may also be a driving force behind the [decline in basic skills](#) such as reading a map, identifying trees and flowers, and even baking bread?

If we stopped trying to avoid boredom in our kids by filling their schedules with activities or letting them sit in front of a screen, then perhaps they would have the time, interest, and creativity to pursue and learn these disappearing basic skills on their own.

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