

Are You Overscheduling Your Child?

I often have a hard time saying “no” when it comes to social invitations and new opportunities. It’s probably because of a fear of missing out or simply wanting to please others.

This tendency has become increasingly problematic since becoming a parent. My 4 and 6-year-old daughters are bombarded with activity requests, birthday party invitations, and organized sports, among many other things.

While I’m grateful for these opportunities, it begs the question: are children and families overscheduled?

In recent years, there has been an influx of books and research exploring this delicate topic. *Kidshealth.org*, a leading website providing information about children’s health, behavior, and development, says “some parents feel it’s more productive to keep their kids constantly occupied rather than leave time for playing, exploring, and learning on their own. They might also feel that their kids will miss out on key experiences if they aren’t doing what other kids are.”

According to Michael Thompson, a clinical psychologist and author of [*The Pressured Child*](#), “As a general principle, there is a line between a highly enriched, interesting, growth-promoting childhood and an overscheduled childhood. And nobody knows where that line is.”

He [goes on to say](#) that “the real problem lies with parents, especially highly successful ones who have a high degree of control over their own lives and who try to take similar control over their children’s lives. This leads them to make choices about after-school activities out of anxiety instead of interest in their child’s well-being.”

Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld, author of [*The Over-scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap*](#), says “A cultural phenomenon is taking place where parents are being told that the right way to raise their kids is to involve them in every enrichment opportunity possible, even if it means leaving the entire family anxious and stressed out.”

So, how can we as parents determine when it’s too much?

Rosenfeld suggests parents to “weigh the benefits of participation against the cost-time, energy, logistical effort, stress and expense-to you, your child, and the rest of your family.”

With so many choices out there, the decision about which activities to schedule can feel overwhelming, especially as summer approaches, a period that lacks the daily structure of school.

Yet, parents can take control of the family calendar by gaining input from their children and not being afraid to say “no.” In addition to reducing family stress, such actions can also serve to stimulate the imaginations of children.

After all, it is my observation that my children are often happiest and most curious when left to run freely at a playground or explore a natural setting. Imagine the endless possibilities for creativity when children actually have “down time.”

We live in a culture that seems to measure happiness and success by how many activities or social events are on one’s calendar.

Breaking away from such thinking may be the key to tapping into your child’s potential and creating an environment in which he or she can thrive—and parents can remain sane.

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