

Know! To Balance Work and Play

The lazy days of summer have come and gone, and the school year is full steam ahead. But with our children's school day followed by homework, sports, music lessons, dance classes, and them wanting to spend time with friends, it's no wonder many of them are feeling overwhelmed and stressed out. While we want to enrich our children's lives through a wide variety of fun and enjoyable activities, helping them become well-rounded people, we also must help them find balance in their lives and minimize stress. Sometimes this means cutting back on the "extra stuff."

It's challenging because there are many benefits to the extra stuff, like building self-esteem, discovering self-interests, teaching responsibility, helping to grow friendships, etc. The extra stuff can be good for them, so knowing when it's too much may not always be that simple.

In an article shared by Synergy Academics, Dr. Jerry Bubrick, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, encourages parents to ask ourselves the following questions to determine if our children are overscheduled:

- Are your children getting quality homework done?
- Are they getting the recommended amount of quality sleep each night?
- Are they able to take part in family activities?
- Are they able to hang out with their friends?

Dr. Bubrick says that if the answer is 'no' to one or more of these questions, then it's time to cut back. He also says that while it's tempting to allow our kids to sign up for all the different activities or programs they are interested in, the risks can sometimes outweigh the rewards.

Those risks include our children:

- Feeling too much pressure.
- Developing issues related to stress and anxiety.
- Experiencing disrupted or not enough sleep.
- Not getting enough free or "down" time.
- Feeling isolated and not spending time with friends.
- Getting poor grades and decreased academic performance.

In helping our children find balance, they must first be clearly aware that their number one priority is school. If grades begin to decline or they are falling behind in their schoolwork, then that means something else must go. And that something else is the extra stuff.

Figure out how much time your child needs on average, to complete daily and weekend homework. This will vary for every child and planning is key. From there you will know how much time is left in your child's schedule to dedicate to extracurricular activities, knowing that time may need slight adjustments around school testing, big projects, etc.

To help minimize the stress that surrounds homework, and help your child make the most of their study time, encourage them to follow these simple tips:

- Select a well-lit, comfortable, quiet place to study, free from distractions.
- Keep extra pencils, pens, paper, etc., in your dedicated study space.
- Keep your space clean and organized.
- Use a daily planner for assignments and check them off as you go.
- Don't wait until the last minute to complete assignments. Create timelines for long-term projects and stick to them.
- Dedicate space for every class in your book bag.
- Make study guides and/or study cards to help break down important information.
- Talk about assignments with friends.
- If you are struggling, ask for help.

Young people are much less likely to feel overwhelmed with school and homework when they've taken steps to be prepared, organized, and focused. These steps will also help to free up time to then put toward the extra stuff, like spending much-needed time with their friends, participating in their favorite sports, playing an instrument, taking a dance class, etc.

Of course, there are additional stressors that come with school, as well as extracurriculars, which can overwhelm and exhaust our children. In the tip to follow, we will look at ways to help our children unwind and destress on a regular basis to maintain healthy minds and bodies.

Sources

Synergy Academics: Balancing School and Extracurricular Activities. Oct. 16, 2019.

Eli Terry Jr. Middle School (Terryville, CT): Study and Homework Tips for Middle School Students.