



## So Many Activities, So Little Time

**S**tudents who are involved in extracurricular activities—from chess club to cheerleading to chorus—tend to have higher self-esteem and stronger connections to school. But an overloaded schedule with too many activities can have the opposite effect, leaving your child—and you!—stressed. Keep these tips in mind for managing your child's activity load.

### **Aim for 3 activities.**

Though every child is different, psychologists often suggest involving a child in no more than three activities at a time: one social activity (like Boys' Club or a church group); one physical activity (like gymnastics, swimming, or basketball); and one artistic activity, such as an art class or music lessons.

### **Limit involvement.**

To avoid burnout, keep involvement in any one activity to just a day or two a week, unless your child absolutely begs for more. Check with them periodically to make sure they are still eager to attend; if not, scale back.

### **Broaden their horizons.**

Although following your child's interests is important, introduce your child to something new, whether it's a new sport, a musical instrument, or a group like Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.

The secret to keeping enthusiasm high is to start slowly and gauge your child's interest before committing beyond the first few sessions.

### **Be supportive, not critical.**

No matter what your child is interested in, remember that your job as a parent is to be supportive. The point of activities is to expand your child's interests and abilities, not to transform him or her into a child prodigy or the next sports superstar.

### **Schedule downtime.**

Children need time to ponder, explore, and play—but an overloaded schedule prevents that. Make sure that when the day is over and the homework is done, there's still time for your child to be a kid.



### **Change it up.**

Specializing in one activity—especially a sport—at a very young age can be harmful. Pediatricians discourage the kind of repetitive movements that come from concentrated effort in one sport. Plus, kids who dedicate themselves to a single sport early can burn out later and may regret not trying other sports.

### **Watch for signs of stress.**

The stress of trying to keep up with too many planned activities can take a physical toll on your child. Watch for signs of stress, including stomachaches and headaches, difficulty paying attention, a drop-off in interest in activities he or she used to enjoy, and increased “clinginess” with a parent or other close adult (e.g., teacher, babysitter). If you notice any of these signs, chances are your child needs to cut back on activities and de-stress.

### **Decompress at home.**

Make sure there's room in your schedule for family time. Children need to have meals with their parents, hear bedtime stories, share chores, and play games. Extra-curricular activities can help children learn and grow, but remember that what your child needs first and foremost is to feel special and loved.