



5 Ways to Manage Your Child's Schedule

A common belief is that to make a child successful, we need to focus on skill development as early as possible—playing Mozart to the womb, enrolling children in enrichment programs by age 2. We all want our children to thrive in today's hyper-competitive world, but a highly scheduled approach can be damaging to the health and emotional well-being of children and parents alike.

Child psychiatrists frequently see **over-scheduled families**. The pressure to be involved in and excel at everything leaves some children feeling depressed, despondent, or rebellious. It can also be harmful to their sense of self, individuality, creativity, imagination, equanimity, and health.

How can we do better? If you think your family is over-scheduled, here are some principles to keep in mind.

Strategies to Manage Scheduling Stress

1. **Say “no” to the occasional enrichment opportunity.** This will not endanger your child's future. Like Tylenol, more is not better—not only does more not bring down the fever better or faster, too much is toxic. Consider: what can your family tolerate comfortably? If adding another activity will overload you, resist pressure from coaches or peers who insist you *must* say “yes.” Making hard, sensible choices is something we adults can model for our families.
2. **Martyrdom is no model for a good adult life.** Self-sacrifice does not equal good parenting. To have enough energy and good humor to nurture a child, parents need a life, too. Being happy with our own lives is a wonderful gift to give our children. We all need time for our marriages, our friendships, and ourselves.
3. **Aim for equilibrium.** While overscheduling can be harmful, stopping activities entirely is neither feasible nor advisable. However, cutting back just a bit – maybe 5 to 10 percent – may bring a better balance.
4. **Nothing means more than family time.** Be *unproductive* sometimes. Spend relaxed family time together with only one goal: enjoying one another. For a child, spending time with a coach is less enriching than spending time with a parent who enjoys their company. This time together bolsters their self-esteem more effectively than anything else.
5. **Do parenting your own way.** Raising a child is an ever-changing ballet, a dance between parents, children, spouses, extended family, friends, and the community. With each child, we perform new and different moves that we've never done quite this or that way before. It's not always graceful – sometimes it's uncomfortable and awkward – but when it comes to your child, no expert dances better than you.

Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.

For more resources on managing stress and other topics, visit us online: mghclaycenter.org

