

INSIGHTS

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Is your child too busy?

Many modern kids don't have a chance to get bored. They are always on the go. As they get older their lives become more organised. Now is a good time to take stock of your child's schedules to see if there's time for relaxation, free play and catching up with family.



As the school year cranks up, kids' involvement in after school activities gets under way as well. It seems everyone in the family gets on the activity round-about once school starts back.

Now is a good time to take stock of your child's after-school schedule to make sure that there's time for relaxation, free play and catching up with family.

A recent Australian study found that four and five year olds spend more time in organised, structured activities than in unstructured play. They spend 4.2 hours each day in unstructured play and watching television compared to 5.2 hours visiting others, doing lessons or classes or in child care.

So much for the image of childhood being a time of carefree, child-initiated fun!

As they get older their lives become more organised. The proliferation of organised sport, performance-based and educational type activities available in the burgeoning 'child development and education' industry ensures that kids' lives are heavily scheduled. Many modern kids don't have a chance to get bored. They are always on the go.

But has it gone too far? While high parental involvement to maximize kids' potential in the early years is to be applauded, this flurry of activity can leave parents exhausted too. The idea of having a few spare hours to read a book or laze on the couch is foreign to many parents. They are vague memories of a different life stage when life revolved around them, their partner and friends.

It seems we try to fit so much in our days that there isn't a lot of fun in parenting for many people. Kids too are feeling the strain. The rise in childhood anxiety as reported by educators and health professionals indicates that the push for early success comes at a cost to children's well-being and mental health.

Seek a balance

Most of the evidence suggests that parents should take a balanced approach to child-rearing and make sure that kids have sufficient time to just be kids. Not everything in their lives needs to be tied to learning or needs to have a purpose. One or two organised activities a day maybe okay, but any more, and you may find you are creating a 'stimulus junkie'. When children want to add an organised or adult-lead activity to an already bulging schedule then they should be encouraged to delete an activity, which is a great life skill.

Build regular down-time into family life.

Avoid being a family that's always on the go. Make sure you have some down-time so family members can relax and have the chance to connect. And don't be afraid that your kids may become bored. Boredom gives kids opportunities to keep themselves occupied. This may mean that you need to say no to an afterschool activity. Alternatively, kids can participate but maybe another adult can take them and pick them up.

Some tips for getting the balance of activities right:

1. Make sure kids have a couple of after-school activities that suit their interests, and that they want to do.
2. They should have enough spare time to do homework without feeling stressed.
3. Make sure they have spare time each day for self-initiated activities including watching television, using the Internet (if appropriate age-wise) and socialising.
4. Check that children have opportunities each day to spend time with family members including parents.



Are kids too busy these days? Tell me what you think. Visit [Facebook.com/michaelgroseparenting](https://www.facebook.com/michaelgroseparenting), look for The Busyness Trap on the Discussion page and leave a comment.

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