

How much is too much? UT expert offers tips on kids' extracurricular activities

September 3 2012, by Matt Devereaux

Involving children in extracurricular activities builds greater self-esteem and leadership skills. Children learn teamwork, do better in school, and stay healthier.

But a UT expert also cautions parents about over commitment and its detrimental effects.

Too many children experience over commitment, or what is sometimes called "hyper parenting," said Matt Devereaux, a child development specialist and an associate professor in the Department of Family and [Consumer Sciences](#).

When this happens, it can cause children's grades to slip, make them irritable, and strain relationships with their parents.

"When they hit that breaking point, kids are very stressed," he said. "In today's society, kids are involved in so many activities, more than they can typically handle. Just because you do a lot doesn't automatically make it good. Just like eating, you have to do it in moderation."

Devereaux offers these guidelines for a healthy balance:

Do a gut check—Are you involving your child in many activities because it makes you feel good? Do you hope they'll make your child more successful one day? Does your child really want participate in all of them?

"Parents can be very competitive and they want to compare their children with other families," Devereaux said. "They put their kids on a pedestal."

Be attentive—When children are strained from too many activities, they reach a [breaking point](#), but it looks different for each youngster, based on [personality](#) and temperament.

"Research shows that kids are afraid to tell their parents, 'I don't want to do this anymore,' because they think parents might be disappointed in them," Devereaux said.

Limit activities—Children should be doing no more than two activities at a time. If there's only one child in a family, perhaps the family can manage three activities.

"But remember, there's also school," he said.

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

Citation: How much is too much? UT expert offers tips on kids' extracurricular activities (2012, September 3) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-09-ut-expert-kids-extracurricular.html>

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