

How to foster your child's imagination

July 1 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—With school, sports and assorted activities, many kids have little or no free time. That fast-paced lifestyle can actually stifle their development, making them less likely to be self-starters.

It could also limit their imagination, an important ingredient in creativity and problem-solving.

University of Colorado-Boulder researchers found that kids who spend more time in less-structured activities have better self-directed control and thinking skills than those who spend more time in structured activities. Think of less-structured activities as [free play](#)—alone or with friends—reading, drawing and casual social outings.

Other research has found value in some completely unstructured time to daydream and let the mind wander. Give your children time, space and some simple tools, like paper and colored pencils, to start their creative juices flowing.

Free time allows kids to come up with imaginative ideas and find creative solutions to problems. It encourages qualities such as independent thinking, self-reliance and perseverance—the drive to keep trying if something doesn't work the first time. So when you're looking ahead at the weekly calendar, be sure to leave some blocks of time empty.

Not sure if your child is overscheduled? The American Academy of Family Physicians lists these common warning signs:

- Your child is constantly tired.
- Your child is often grumpy.
- Your child has developed [physical problems](#) like headaches or belly aches.
- Your child has difficulty sleeping.
- Your child shies away from social contacts and would rather stay home.
- Your [child](#) no longer enjoys or wants to do activities that used to

be his or her favorites.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians has more advice to create the right [balance of activity and down time](#) for kids.

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