

## Overscheduled Elementary and Middle School Students

Overscheduled kids is a common term today in America. You can hear second graders talk about how “stressed out” they are and seventh graders using energy drinks to keep themselves moving throughout their schedules. Some families have commitments from sun up to long after sun down. The pressure can be intense – on children and on parents. Parents want what is best for their children and you never want your child to be left behind or left out. But there isn’t a one formula fits all for raising children. When it comes to extracurricular activities, many families have to try several different schedules before they find one that works the best. Your child’s temperament, your work schedule, how many children are in your family – all of these impact if your elementary or middle school aged student feels overscheduled or not. Let’s walk through some steps so you can discover if you need to make some family adjustments!

- Start by observing your family and its functioning. What do you see? How many times a week are you able to eat dinner together as a family? Who is in tears a lot over seemingly minor infractions? Who seems energized and full of life?
- Talk with every member of your family privately and find out what they’re thinking. Be specific – how do you feel about going to the soccer field three times a week for your sister’s game? Do you like taking art class and violin and being on the swim team? What activity brings you joy? What activity do you not enjoy? Why? How much pressure are you under?
- Play the “what if” game. “What if you had a full week at home – school as always – but what else would you do with your time?” “What if you could do anything this weekend?” Their answers can help you determine their likes/dislikes and how they want to spend their time.
- Observe your children – especially in the mornings and late at night. Are they getting enough sleep? Are they waking up easily and in a positive mood most mornings or are you dragging them out of bed? Do they use caffeine to get their day started? Children require more sleep than you think.
- Be willing to say no and make some changes. Flexibility is a must as your family works through some scheduling changes.
- Children require unscheduled time. It is necessary for healthy development. Allow your children time to be creative at home, with friends and outside in nature. Make sure they have opportunities to be physically active without a referee or stopwatch on them. Adults are “in charge” of children’s lives a lot. In order to raise independent children, we have to provide them with opportunities to be in charge of themselves. – age appropriate opportunities of course.
- Pressure is a part of life. But does it have to be a part of your child’s life every day? It really is okay to pull back, slow down and allow your family to shine. Watch what happens!