



Fact Sheet

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Hurry Up! It's Time to Go!

Melinda Hill, CFCS, Wayne County

Dance lessons, ball games, music lessons, homework—before we know it, bathtime and bedtime. Where does the time go on weekdays? We as adults are busy with the daily responsibilities of our own lives in our fast-paced society. Microwaves help prepare quick meals, drive throughs provide food on the run and while an occasional evening of “running” is okay, a lifestyle of being on the run can be very stressful for children. Sometimes it is essential to plan for some “home time” or “down time” where there are no plans, no pushing, and no hurrying—just time to be together and play.

Developmentally Appropriate Activities

Sometimes we as parents push children into activities and programs because of our desire to have them involved, not necessarily their desire to be involved. Community opportunities such as sport teams, art classes, computer classes, and other enrichment opportunities can be an asset to a child or a stressor if they deprive them of developmentally appropriate activities and play. What children learn through their play experiences builds the foundation for learning the “academics” during the school year.

Before signing your child up for the next season, talk with them and ask a few questions: What is your favorite thing about this (class, sport, event)? What do you wish you had more time to do? Why do you want to be involved in this? What are you willing to give up in order to have time to be involved? After the discussion, review his or her answers and evaluate the true desire or lack thereof to guide you in making future plans.

Life in the Unhurried Lane

David Elkind identifies the sources of “hurrying” children to be the home, school, and the media. In many homes, children are assigned tasks beyond their capabilities. For example: Child is left on his own before and after school with a list of chores to be accomplished at an early elementary age. Parents expect positive choices and wise use of time to accomplish all items with perfection. Or, another example would be to confide in the child about adult concerns such as divorce, finances, remarriage, etc.

The school has become a source of pressure because of the measurement-driven programs. Elkind suggests that “if we take some of the pressure off schools and school administrators, we will take some of the pressure off children.” Through the media, children are exposed to circumstances and situations outside of their worlds. Advertising also influences children to purchase “things,” and to disregard the rules of society.

We naturally want the best for our children and society tells us the “best” means to involve them and prepare them for many avenues in life. Elkind also suggests to look for other signs of pushing children: pressure to succeed in sports (beginning at pre-school levels), providing children with adult-type designer clothes, sponsoring adult social activities before the children are developmentally ready, placing adult responsibilities upon children, using children as confidantes, and allowing them to read or view materials inappropriate for children.

Letting Children Be Children

How do we know what is enough to keep our children stimulated and not too much that they miss out on the days of play? Maryann Manning advises the following options for parents:

- Provide experiences designed developmentally for children, not adults.
- Provide a nurturing and caring environment with sufficient child–parent involvement and numerous opportunities to increase self-esteem, self-discipline, and responsibility.
- Consider play an important aspect of childhood and encourage children to explore, invent, and create through play appropriate for children rather than adults.
- Reduce the over-emphasis of adult life experiences on children's lives.
- Recognize that children and adults are different, and it is not in the best interest of the children to be treated as equals with adults.

Manning also suggests that parents appreciate each of their children for their individual talents, interests, and abilities. Spend unstructured time with each other so that you really get to know each other and can establish com-

munication of feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Find out what the child is feeling pressured by. How can you help to reduce that pressure yet encourage the child to be the best he or she can be?

It is our job as parents to know where our children are, who their friends are, as well as what they are reading, watching on television, viewing on the Internet, listening to, and being influenced by. The outside influence of these factors can increase the social peer pressure of children. As we learn to understand our children, it is our job also to encourage them to be children, without adult imposed responsibilities and allowing time for things that are important to them.

References

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