

Tackle Your Family's Overscheduled Life

Standing on the cusp of a new school year is only one opportunity to reel in your family's commitments and make life less crammed with activities and less stressful. Many parents feel they have to pack their children's schedules in order to give them the best chance for success in an uncertain future.

This frantic effort may not accomplish the desired results and will almost certainly keep you and your family "enjoying the journey". No one can deny that life today is challenging. There are, however, steps you can take to analyze it, counter the inevitable stress and possibly give your child a more enriching experience.

Partly it is your perspective on family life. Amy McCready, in her article "[A Three Letter Word for More JOYFUL Parenting](#)," advocates replacing "**I have to...**" with "**I get to...**" This attitude reset can make all the difference. She reminds us that the time we have with our children is fleeting, and remembering this fact is a great attitude reset, both for yourself and to model for your child.

That's not to say that there aren't steps parents can take to reduce stress. Often we over-schedule everyone's lives. The website [Becoming Minimalist](#) inspired these ideas:

1. Are you signing your child up for this activity because he is interested or because you want him to be? For any activities, ask whether they are necessary and contributing to well being and growth.
2. How many different activities can you and your child really juggle and enjoy in any given week? Talk with your child and look at the whole picture and organize their commitments.
3. Can you leave space between events? Don't rush frantically from school to an after-school club and then onto a sports practice with a stop for pizza for dinner squeezed in between.
4. Have you included family dinners in the schedule? It may not be realistic to sit down together every night, but set a realistic goal; use that time to talk with and listen to each other, maybe choosing a conversation topic ahead of time to jump start making meal time a social time away from electronics.

5. Can you schedule a weekly game or movie night, or set up a friendly family competition? That may mean missing the game or concert, but it's an important trade-off to promote communications and healthy relationships.
6. Kids thrive when their lives are predictable. What can you do to establish a family routine? Maybe it's family meeting and dinner on Sunday evening, dinner together on Tuesday and Thursday, or a bi-weekly family movie or game nights on Friday night or Saturday afternoon. It isn't an all or nothing equation; you have to decide what makes the most sense for your family. Just be sure that at least some of those times are phone-free and that you model good listening and attention for your family.
7. What about your own list of commitments? It may be important to you to be active in the community or to participate in a local choir or basketball league, but be realistic about what you can do. Certainly being involved in the community is important but like everything else, it is a question of finding the right balance.
8. Consider "unplugging" for a day, and see where it takes you. Have everyone turn off their phones and do without SnapChat, Facebook and Twitter. Have everyone in the family "park" their cell phones and tablets out of reach when you're trying to cut the cord for a little while.

Slamming the brakes on your overscheduled life probably won't work, but you can lay the foundation for redesigning your life now. Start by taking some time to chart what you are doing **now** and see how you and your family are spending your time. Once you've done that, you can start to see the path to where you want to be. In the meantime, schedule at a family dinner for next week and then make that a habit!

Further Reading

There articles explores the value of scheduling less in your family's life:

["How Free Play Can Define Kids' Success."](#)

<https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/02/15/how-free-play-can-define-kids-success/>

["The Importance of Family Time on Kids' Mental Health and Adjustment to Life"](#)

<https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/psychology/importance-of-family-time-on-kids-mental-health-and-adjustment-to-life/>

William Doherty's book, [The Intentional Family: Simple Rituals to Strengthen Family Ties](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/341498.The_Intentional_Family) explores ways of opening channels of communications within families.
http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/341498.The_Intentional_Family

Taking Action

Some tools to help you find balance in your family's commitments:

["Reframing Parent-Child Time Can Reduce Stress"](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/high-octane-women/201504/reframing-parent-child-time-can-reduce-stress) from **Psychology Today** suggests ways to move from "I have to" to "I get to."
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/high-octane-women/201504/reframing-parent-child-time-can-reduce-stress>

A short questionnaire you can take to help figure out if your child is overscheduled:
<http://getparentinghelpnow.com/pdf/OverscheduledAssessment.pdf>.

["10 Signs Your Kids are Overscheduled"](http://www.realsimple.com/work-life/family/kids-parenting/overscheduled-kids) from **Real Simple** asks some basic questions to help you look at your family's routine.
<http://www.realsimple.com/work-life/family/kids-parenting/overscheduled-kids>

Are you inspired to hold a family meeting? We've got links on our website:
[Communications Section of Further Reading](#).