



## **Is Your Family Over-Scheduled?**

Introducing a child to something new, fun and positive is one of the joys of parenting. Whether it is swimming or music lessons, playing sports on a team, or participating in Scouting, activities are terrific ways to expand a child's range of experience. It is awesome to provide your child with opportunities to develop skills, learn about the world and figure out what he enjoys doing. Sometimes, though, we can over-schedule. In our efforts to introduce our child to all the wonders of the world, how can we tell when we've crossed the line? How can we tell when things get out of balance?

You know your family and your child. Every family is different. For some families, having music lessons once or twice a week is the perfect balance. For other families, it is over the top. For the family with a serious athlete, such as a swimmer or dancer, daily involvement is expected. Keeping these factors in mind, here are a few tips to keep things in balance for your family.

Monitor how you are spending your time. If you begin to feel that parenthood is another name for a taxi service, you are probably over-scheduled. Of course, things get busy and hectic. If the stress is continuous or you consider painting your car yellow and black, cut back on the number of activities or find a different way for your child to get to his class, lesson or game.

Create a family calendar. This is not only a means of helping life run with greater ease, but it also is a way to clearly see your child's schedule. Family meetings are a perfect time to fill in the calendar for the week or the month. Every so often, notice the blocks of time that your child spends in activities. Also notice the time he is not involved in activities. Is there enough down time or unstructured time? Does his schedule allow him time to wind down before bed?

Maggie Macaulay, MS Ed  
954-483-8021

[Maggie\\_macaulay@msn.com](mailto:Maggie_macaulay@msn.com)  
[www.WholeHeartedParenting.com](http://www.WholeHeartedParenting.com)

Does it allow him ample study time? Are you spending time just relaxing together as a family without an agenda? If you answered “yes,” things are probably in balance.

Another indicator is mealtime. Is your family eating meals together or is your child regularly eating dinner on the run from school to piano lessons? Studies show that eating meals together is vitally important, particularly for teens. “Teens who regularly have meals with their family are less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, smoke, drink, use drugs, and are more likely to have later initiation of sexual activity, and better academic performance than teens who do not. Even after controlling for family connectedness, more frequent family meals have been found to be associated with less substance use, fewer depressive symptoms, and less suicide involvement, and with better grades” [National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University].

The biggest indicator is your child. Have a conversation and listen for signs that he may be over-scheduled. Is he getting enough rest or is he complaining of being overly tired? Is he able to maintain his grades with his current schedule or are they dropping? Does he have time to visit with friends and family or does his activity take up all of his social time? Is he playing sports and getting injured often, meaning his body does not have the rest or down time it needs to heal?

You are the ultimate decision-maker when it comes to your family. You know yourself and you know your children. If things begin to feel out of balance, check out how you are spending your time, what things look like on your family calendar, and if you are sharing family meals frequently enough for your family. Make adjustments – even minor ones can make a big difference – and check out the results. Most importantly, check in with your child. He is the key.

Maggie Macaulay, MS Ed, is the owner of [Whole Hearted Parenting](#), a parent educator, speaker and coach, Director of [Redirecting Children’s Behavior™ South Florida](#) and the 2008 ABWA Parent Educator of the Year. Maggie is a featured parenting expert on NBC 6. She can be reached at (954) 483-8021 or [maggie\\_macaulay@msn.com](mailto:maggie_macaulay@msn.com).