



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #20

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Activity Overload

Our fast-paced world forces many children to mimic adults' rush through life. Students, sometimes with furrowed brows and clenched fists, race from soccer fields to school meetings to piano lessons—grabbing meals on the run and collapsing into bed at night exhausted.

Good activity choices bring success.

- ✓ Actively involve your child in choosing the activities.
- ✓ Choose a few good activities instead of a whole slew of them.
- ✓ Match the activities to the child's interests.
- ✓ Encourage full participation in each activity chosen so your child has the chance to succeed.
- ✓ Most of the activities chosen should serve as outlets, reducing stress instead of producing more stress.
- ✓ Allow down-time, when no activities are planned.



With the very best of intentions, we set out to chart the course and plan the events of our children's lives according to what makes sense to *us*. What seldom occurs to us is that children may view the world in an entirely different way than we do.

We need to stop and listen to our children. Their feelings, emotions and attitudes can help determine if they feel overloaded by all their activities. It may be time to ease up if you notice that your child has little enthusiasm for activities he has enjoyed in the past.

There is relief for the stressed-out, burned-out, blurry-eyed kid. It takes a commitment to limit activities to a more manageable level. It may not be a popular thing to do, but there comes a time when parents can and should say "no" to more activities for their child, for both the child's and the family's benefit.

Finding the right kind and level of activity starts with knowing your children. Do they resent not having more free-time? Do they need more alone time than others? Do they thrive on competition, or do they do their best when working independently? Do they like activities that require physical skills or mental skills? Are they leaders or more comfortable being teammates? Answers to these questions are important for avoiding activity overload.

Activity overload, and the stress it produces, can rob children of a carefree childhood.



- Children who give themselves 100 percent to *one* activity of their choice will be less stressed than if they half-heartedly participate in 5 different activities.
- Activities with a strong purpose often fit children who tend to be intense, but these children also need activities that allow them to enjoy the sheer pleasure of play.
- Activities that your child has a passion for should be top priority. The first activities to eliminate are those your child shows little interest in or passion for.
- Determine why your child is in each activity. If she is in it to please you, it may be time to have another look at that activity.
- Some children are stressed by the type of activity or how it is organized. A change to a less competitive activity may be all that is needed.
- Make time to plan family activities that focus on recreation instead of competition.
- Your child may be more interested in an activity that is unique to her instead of what everyone else is doing.
- Find out if your child is doing an activity just because he is good at it or because he truly loves it. If the activity takes an excessive amount of time, he needs to love it.