



Connect with Kids

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For the Classroom

The Power of Free Play

Video Overview

Everybody needs a little playtime – even turtles – according to research from the University of Tennessee. They say that playtime, may, in fact, make for a life worth living. So what about kids, who with academics and sports and dance and theater are too-often often-scheduled and over-stressed? Some experts have a solution...to schedule in free time.

Tessa, for example, spends five days a week, four hours a day after school at gymnastics class.

“By the time I get home, it’s like eight [o’clock] or so,” she says, “and I eat and do my homework and take a shower and talk to my parents about how the day’s gone - and then I go to bed.”

Experts have come up with a solution for kids like Tessa: Schedule in free time.

“Almost by definition a ‘schedule of free time’ sounds kind of paradoxical to all of us,” says psychologist Nadine Kaslow, “but I do think planning for free time or for down time is very, very important for children.”

She says along with creative play and spending time with family and friends, free time provides moments away from competition.

“With all these activities and schoolwork, there’s tremendous pressure to perform - often to compete, to excel,” says Kaslow, “and that leisure time and free time doesn’t have those demands.”

On the other hand, she says, some kids don’t handle free time very well.

That’s something Tessa discovered last year, when she decided to take a break.

“I didn’t like it as much as being in gymnastics, even though I had time,” she remembers.

Experts say let your children choose their after school activities, choose how busy they want to be, but watch for signs of burnout.

“They will tell you, whether it’s through words or tears - or they’ll say, ‘when are we going again,’ or they’ll start screaming when you say it’s time to go,” says Kaslow.

What We Need to Know

Organized activities outside of a child’s school day certainly have their benefits: social skills, self-discipline, physical exercise and sportsmanship, exploration and enjoyment, to name a few. For some families, however, an over-scheduled existence may be fueled by a desire not to be left out or to build the resume of extracurricular activities that students and parents view as necessary for college admissions.