

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are organized activities that require a routine time commitment outside of regular school hours, such as being on a sports team (school team/club), 4-H club, band, Boy & Girl Scouts, church group, science club, drama club - the list goes on and on.

Extracurricular activities not only provide kids with structured and supervised instruction, but they also teach everyday life skills in a more practical and hands-on way.

And while extracurricular activities provide lots of benefits, like most things, they also have a downside to them as well. When making a decision about which activities to participate in, kids and parents should consider the pros and cons.

The Benefits of Extracurricular Activities:

Higher Academic Success:

There has been a multitude of research studies done that indicate kids who participate in extracurricular activities generally perform better in school than those who do not. Not only did kids have higher grades, better attendance and higher rates of graduation, these studies also show kids who participate in extracurricular activities also had more positive feelings overall about school and they had higher reported desire to continue their education beyond high school, according to researcher Douglas Reeves.

Explore & Develop Interests:

Kids who participate in different extracurricular activities have additional opportunities to discover interests, skills and purpose beyond home and school. And while kids often have a wide range of subjects they can explore at school, extracurricular activities most times allow kids to explore an interest more in-depth than what they would get during school hours.

And when skills and interests are developed and enhanced, many times they can lead to a new interest that a student wouldn't have been exposed to or considered beforehand.

Many extracurricular activities also provide experiences that help develop and broaden a kid's perspective of the world, especially experiences that involve volunteering and/or providing community service to others. And in this day and age, and because of technology, developing a global understanding is becoming more and more necessary for kids to grow, maneuver and flourish as adults in the current and future workforce.

Better Physical & Emotional Health:

When kids participate in extracurricular activities, they have less time and opportunities to consume media. Instead, they are physically and socially interactive, while learning and improving talents and life skills.

According to research, the average school-aged kid spends between seven to nine hours a day playing video games, online and/or watching TV. This can take a heavy toll on kids and their

well-being. It is well documented that social media, televised news and gaming all can have a negative impact on kids, including cyberbullying, increased anxiety and depression, and lack of sleep and exercise.

Furthermore, kids who are involved in extracurricular activities are less likely to indulge in illicit drug use/abuse. Not only do they have less free time, as boredom is one of the most common reasons kids give as to why they use illicit drugs, but they don't want to be kicked off a team or club and they want to do their very best when participating in their activities.

In addition, kids who participate in extracurricular activities tend to have a higher level of self-esteem. The more achieved success a kid experiences, the more their self-confidence improves.

Provide Social Opportunities:

Let's face it, making friends can be extremely hard but one of the easiest ways to make friends is through extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for a kid to interact with other kids close in age who have a similar interest, which may help foster friendships outside of their normal group of friends.

Furthermore, being part of a club or team gives most kids a sense of belonging and a sense of pride.

Yet, there are certainly concerns and drawbacks to/for kids and families that are involved in a lot of extracurricular activities.

The Downsides of Extracurricular Activities:

Time Commitment/Busy Schedule:

Too many scheduled activities and very little free and leisure time can be detrimental. Playtime is important for young kids in learning to use their imagination and learning things on their own through play. And older kids also need free time to socialize as well as decompress and recharge.

Similarly, when your children go through a tough and tight schedule, which leaves no free time, it may lead to frustration, tiredness, and exhaustion. This may not only affect their academic performance but also the health of your little one. Thus, extracurricular activities are extra in nature and should be limited.

Extra Expenses with Extracurricular Activities:

Extracurricular activities come along with their own expenses too. Almost always, regardless of the activity, there is an additional expense. Many activities have dues and/or there might be a cost for shoes and uniforms, musical instruments or the cost of travel. The list goes on and on.

Loss of Family Time:

Maybe the biggest negative to extracurricular activities is the strain it puts on families. Extracurricular activities can put stress on the whole family. Many times, parents have to rush to transport kids to multiple, tightly scheduled activities. Not only is the kid who participates in

activities missing out on family time but often other kids in the home also miss out while parents are busy making sure everyone gets to their activities. All of the dropping off and picking up cuts into family time. Game and movie nights are canceled or continually moved around and meals are eaten on the go instead of at the dinner table.

With all of that being said, when parents and kids weigh the pros and cons of each extracurricular activity, they should figure out works best and is doable and fair for the entire family.

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