

Time to Play

by Diane Trautman

Have you heard the latest radio ad produced by the Office of National Drug Control Policy? In the ad, a mother rattles off a series of extracurricular activities to which she and her husband have committed their daughter, to prevent the girl from getting mixed up with the wrong crowd.

No doubt the spot aims to promote engagement in healthy activities after school when, research demonstrates, many kids get into trouble. Still, the first word that popped into my head was “over-scheduled.” I thought of the parents who call me to schedule tutoring in between soccer and music lessons and karate. I am familiar with that whirlwind scheduling and I feel exhaustion for the parents and the kids.

In Saugus High School teacher Ty Devoe’s study skills workshop, he stresses the need for students to review, analyze, and synthesize information in order to make it meaningful and store it in long-term memory. But if we are busy racing from one thing to the next, we develop a habit of superficial involvement that doesn’t permit a deeper processing and retention of information. This inability to fully focus and explore makes true learning difficult.

On the flip side, the lack of a consistent schedule can certainly hamper students. This is particularly problematic for children diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, who need structure in their schedule and their environment in order to function at their best.

Somewhere in the mix we need to allow our children the time and freedom to go out and explore and learn from their experiences, says David Elkind, Ph.D., Professor of Child Development at Tufts University, and author of many books including *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*. Dr. Elkind believes that children are burdened with unreasonable expectations and too many activities. It is most important, he says, that we give our children roots by reminding them “that they are important in our lives — that we care about them deeply,” and that “we give them wings to be what they can be.”

As we begin a new year, this may be a good time to adjust schedules in a way that supports good education and allows our kids the time to enjoy their childhood.

Happy New Year!