

The Wellness Family

Dr. Gerken Keeps You Informed

Hyper-Parenting

As parents we want what's best for our children: a warm, loving home, a good education, all the things that we didn't have, all wrapped up with a bright future. This is all well and good, unless we become so focused on our desires that we forget what's inherently best for the child.

What is Hyper-Parenting?

This phrase was coined to describe a dangerous trend being seen in the past several years. Parents in middle and upper-middle class homes are becoming so involved in every detail of their child's academic, athletic and social lives that they're not allowing their children to just be children. They're unnecessarily augmenting their environment and over-scheduling every minute of their day.

These parents have forgotten that childhood is the preparation, not the event. Children aren't supposed to be perfect, well-rounded, miniature adults; they're supposed to be children.

Over-Activities

It's not unusual for a mother of two pre-adolescents to never have a free minute on a weekday afternoon. With all the extras on the calendar many parents are running their children to as many as four extra-curricular activities a week, including:

- Sports and travel teams
- Clubs
- Dance lessons
- Music and art lessons
- Additional tutoring

Individually these activities are valuable, but combined they have a tendency to leave parents and children feeling overwhelmed.

Some parents claim that they involve their children in these activities to avoid the risk of boredom. What they are forgetting is that boredom is a catalyst for creativity. Boredom can fuel a child's imagination, while over-scheduling the child doesn't allow them the opportunity to exercise their innate ability to entertain themselves.

Competitive-Parenting

Raising the perfect child has almost become a competitive sport, with the prize being speaking early, qualifying for gifted and talented programs, or earning admission to an elite university. These things, and not a well-balanced and happy child, have become the new measure of parental accomplishment.

According to Alvin Rosenfeld, M.D., "The competitive parent reacts to the latest science reported in the media – which professionals know is of dubious validity – by broadcasting Mozart into their infant's nurseries to stimulate mathematical ability, enrolling toddlers in



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organized gymnastics programs (to fine-tune large motor development), and putting children too young to comprehend the rules in competitive team sports. They insist that kids who are barely awake sit for 7 AM piano lessons and that high-schoolers manicure their resumes to fit profiles elite colleges supposedly are looking for." [1]

Many parents may recognize these characteristics in themselves but, despite the fact that they know their children are over-scheduled, they will choose to keep up the pace for fear that cutting back may harm their beloved child's future.

Healthy Skepticism

Parents today lack conviction in their own ability to parent; mostly due to the latest parenting expert's advice. There was a time when Dr. Spock urged parents to trust themselves and their instincts, but that's not the case today when experts routinely imply

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that every decision made for a child will have critical future implications. With their tone of urgency and authority they raise parental anxiety to a fever pitch that brings out the worst in all concerned.

What happened to taking a little time to consider the information being provided? Every "scientific report" or "research study" isn't going to be the one thing that is going to turn a family around yet parents respond like it is, making immediate and drastic changes to their children's lifestyles.

It's wiser to develop a healthy amount of skepticism because these "experts" aren't alleviating stress but are actually adding pressure to an already tense situation. If this expertise works then implement it, but if it doesn't, this isn't a sign of failure as a parent; there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all expert advice.

The End Results

We have to wonder how this kind of life is affecting the children. What are the children feeling when faced with an endless parade of activities and a constant schedule? Consider what damage this could be doing to a developing self-esteem.

The subliminal message that kids are getting from this constant scrutiny and hyperactivity is that they are inadequate in their current unpolished state. They convince themselves that if they were acceptable just as they are, then they wouldn't need all of this improvement. They begin to feel inadequate and inferior, like there is something innately wrong with them.

Children need to be taught at an early age that it's okay to be "unproductive". When a child grows up with a

schedule that has them on the run from 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM, they have a tendency to be workaholics, keeping this same hectic schedule well into adulthood.

Parents need to recognize that little minds have to be allowed "down time" such as:

- Reading together
- Taking walks
- Shooting hoops
- Playing board games
- Sitting and talking

It is during this down time that parents and children can truly discover and enjoy each other; boosting children's self-esteem and helping them recognize their value.

Conclusion

Hyper-parenting has become a problem for both the child and the parent. The child can suffer from severe self-esteem issues while the parent, in their desire to do what's best for their child and help them to grow up healthy and happy, may actually be creating the opposite effect.

Every child wants to be loved and as a parent the best we can do for our children is to love them for who they are: praising their accomplishments and nurturing them where they're weak.

For more information visit:

www.mothering.com
www.icpa4kids.com

1. The Overscheduled Child – Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap
by Alvin Rosenfeld, M.D. and Nicole Wise (Griffin 2001)

Dear Parent,

Dr. Gerken is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. Take a moment today to ask your Family Wellness Chiropractor any questions you may have about your family's overall health and wellness.

This newsletter is provided to you by:

**The Chiropractic Office of
and Dr. Donald Gerken
at 88 E Bonita Road; Suite E
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619.422.3088**