

## 10 signs of an overscheduled child

Children naturally want to participate in activities. But how do you know if you have an overscheduled child? There are clear signposts.

My son wants to try everything. He is currently a member of the school band, is a member of the school choir, is the president of the class and is a member of our basketball team. Just last night, he told me that he wants to be a boy Scout, too. He also wants to join the chess team and participate in the athletics, particularly as a shot put player. I said "Sure!" with a big smile. But I had to follow up with a few simple questions that more parents should be asking themselves about their children.

Parents have to prioritize for their children sometimes, which means their children will eat broccoli before they eat cake, will do their homework before they go out to play, and will say their prayers before they read comic books in bed. Prioritization is a learned skill taught by parents who recognize the importance of not spreading one's self too thin for the sake of distraction. But the time comes when you want to let your child prioritize for him or herself. Here's a few signs we can use for determining whether we're overscheduling them – or they're overscheduling themselves:

### 1. **How are their grades?**

An overscheduled child might have good grades, but that child might also be unduly stressed in keeping them up. Many parents hide behind the idea that their child is different, that they are overachievers and need to be challenged with a full schedule. But grades will suffer if they're not keeping up. Parents should restrict activities when they become overburdening to the more important task of excelling in school.

### 2. **Are they good at any one thing?**

Being a jack of all trades is something admirable for kids, but later in life they may look back and wish they'd mastered at least one of those trades rather than being average in a lot of things. Rather than playing four instruments, it's better for most children to focus on one. Sports and hobbies can be the same way. It's great to try things out, but focusing on something can make a child happier if they're able to excel at it.

### 3. **Do they contact friends without provocation?**

You have an overscheduled child if your kids are looking to parents to set play dates or they have not interest in making friends. Part of growing up is the necessity for a kid to take chances when making friends. Sometimes downtime and boredom is good for a child for the purpose of teaching them to contact friends and find something to do. You might even find it gives you, the parent, more time to schedule your own life.

### 4. **Do they feel anxious?**

Type-A children are often the most stressed out type of child. Getting a second opinion is often helpful when trying to determine the stress levels in your own child. An overscheduled child will have trouble sleeping, have eating issues and will be generally unhappy. Ask your child's friends if they feel like your child is anxious.

**5. Do they feel happy when spending time alone?**

Find a Saturday in the calendar and clear your child's schedule. An overscheduled child may find this idea of "nothing to do" confusing at first, but as the day goes on it is important to evaluate how they are coping. Are they inventing new and interesting hobbies with friends, going out for pick-up games unscheduled? Or are they sitting around watching television and twiddling their thumbs? The overscheduled child will likely watch TV and be bored because he or she has no skills in creating their own schedule.

**6. Do they depend on parents for structure all the time?**

Your child is an overscheduled child if he or she can't navigate the course of a week without obsessively asking for what they're supposed to do next. Kids should have to figure out their own schedule sometimes, and that's what can drive creativity and learning.

**7. Do they think they don't have time for family dinners?**

Probably the biggest loss of closeness in families is the lack of time for sitting down and enjoying meals. Given a child's need for learning dinnertime etiquette as well as how to communicate with parents and siblings, it is important to ensure that dinners are shared (at a table!) among family members at least five days out of a week. By sitting down and breaking bread together, families are more likely to stay close and together throughout life.

**8. Do they ask to skip scheduled activities?**

Perhaps most obvious is the question whether your kid is trying to get out of too much to do. You have an overscheduled child if they're wanting to skip school. Listen to them and watch how many of their activities they're missing to evaluate whether there is too much on the agenda.

**9. Are they sick often?**

Health is a good indicator of an overscheduled child. Calculate the number of times they've

been to the doctor's office, how many days they've missed of school and how often they're complaining of ailments.

10. **Do they make their own decision about what activities to do?**

An overscheduled child frequently has no say in what they do and when. Parents who give the children the option to do activities they choose are to be celebrated and appreciated, but parents who insist on which activities children do because they have an agenda for "how they want them to be" should be rebuked. It may be as simple as asking your child "What do you want to do this year if you could only focus on one activity?" You might be surprised to hear them say, "That'd be a dream!"

My own priorities for my child come down to balance and setting priorities. I want to open up the world for him. I want him to give everything a try but also know he has a lifetime to do this. Yes, letting my son participate in a lot of activities, but we are constantly reevaluating whether he's doing too much. By following a simple list of signs of an overscheduled child, we can ensure we're on the right schedule.