

# Does Family Time Fit into My Schedule

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It's time to face the facts – school is about to start and schedules are about to get busy for both parents and children. Mornings can soon become stressful as students try to locate homework assignments completed the night before, parents frantically make certain everyone is dressed appropriately, and everyone tries to have some sort of breakfast and be out the door on time. Add making lunches to that and mornings are

anything but peaceful. Also, eating together as a family can become a thing of the past without careful and consistent planning since it will be easy to fill those hours with extracurricular activities or homework.

So how can families make time for strengthening family bonds and still be sure children have some extracurricular activities to help them build health and fitness, social skills and just have fun?

First, it is important to realize that more is not necessarily better. When parents equate the number of activities their children are involved in with good parenting, there can be negative consequences. If you want your children to gain skills and self-confidence, that's commendable. However, the [American Academy of Pediatrics reports](#) that too much structured time can contribute to anxiety, stress and depression in children and cause them to become self-critical perfectionists.

One suggestion before committing to extracurricular activities is to focus on what will be manageable for the entire family. When considering each potential activity of each family member, think about the time, cost and transportation involved as well as how it will affect you and your children. Even families with ambitious children may still wish to limit them to three activities—one artistic, one athletic and one social. This will allow for some unstructured time and time to spend together as a family.

Time together doesn't need to be a huge formal affair every day. However, a number of studies have shown that families who take time to eat dinner together report stronger relationships and better grades. [The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University](#) also found a link between families who eat together at least five times per week and a much lower risk of substance abuse.

So, you may already have plans in place for the school year to begin and have signed your children up for various types of activities before and/or after school. Go ahead and give the current commitments two to three weeks to test the waters and see how it works out. At that time, you may wish to sit down and do a quick evaluation by asking the following questions posed by [www.schoolfamily.com](http://www.schoolfamily.com):

- Do your children enjoy their extracurricular activities?  
Do you enjoy them?
- What does the activity accomplish?
- Is it being done out of habit?
- Do you feel like your children need to be in activities because everyone else is, too?
- Do your children spend so much time in activities that you don't know what else is going on in their lives?

You might also double check how often your family has had dinner together or spent time in the yard or playing games together. If your family time is suffering because of so many other activities, you may want to formally, as a family, decide to jump off the "fast train" and slow things down a bit.

Be reminded that jumping off one train doesn't mean it's okay to jump onto another. Learn to enjoy down time for reading, developing a hobby, performing service, playing together as a family or spending more time with a close friend or relative.

Slowing down on extracurricular activities doesn't mean just sitting around watching television or playing games on the internet for hours at a time, either. On the other hand, imagine coming home from work/school and having time to "get organized," run an errand or read the newspaper before having to think about preparing dinner. The children can play outside, listen to their iPods or visit with parents before homework time begins. Sounds like a great plan!



Kathleen Riggs is the Utah State University Extension Family and Consumer Sciences professor for Iron County. She loves yard/garden work, where her favorite tasks are weeding and mowing the lawn. Her favorite appliance is the microwave oven, and her specialty is microwave caramels. She loves family time and occasions that bring everyone together from near or far.