What is the right balance?

The following article written by Jacqui Garkel, Junior School Counsellor, Keilor Campus

As a mother of 4-year-old twins, I still get to enjoy the Mothers’ Group get togethers. The other day, a number of mothers were chatting about the activities their children were involved in. They included swimming lessons, Gymbaroo, ballet lessons, art class, dance class and music lessons. One parent was even considering starting language classes. I felt a moment of panic and guilt and I asked myself: am I a failure as a mother who is depriving her children of developing their skills, as my two children only participate in swimming lessons?

However, when I thought more about it at home, I reflected on what the implications of all those activities are. Why, as modern parents, are we driven to ensure our children become experts in playing an instrument, sport, dance, languages, all of which can lead to hectic nights and exhausting weekends?

Please don’t get me wrong here. I believe that undertaking an extra curricular activity is valuable, as it develops skills, both personal and interpersonal. But what can be the cost to the family, and consequently the children, of the kinds of demands that we seem to be making of ourselves nowadays?

My sister-in-law has teenage children who play representative basketball, local basketball and are involved in sailing. In their household, there are timetables, different family members eat dinner at different times, and the hurried “come on or we’ll be late” is a constant refrain through the week. There is stress, anxiety and fatigue each night. They only get to eat dinner as a family on the weekends and maybe not even then due to the demands of my niece’s irregular representative basketball times.

I strongly believe that ‘down’ time for a family is important. This may involve having a cup of tea or a glass of wine at the end of the day and sharing a casual chat with your partner and children. It may mean that the children go
outside and play, ride a bike or simply relax by sitting quietly in the garden. It may mean that you get to eat dinner as a family and talk about your day. After all, aren’t developing those skills of connectedness, communication, relaxation, and self-regulating emotions important too? Being on the go all the time and committed to a busy schedule can cause anxiety and exhaustion for everyone in the family.

The need for balance is important. Both as a family and as an individual, we need to allow ourselves to have free time and play, as well as having the scheduled activities. It is a mistake to think of free time or free play as a luxury.

So, I will keep taking my children on impromptu visits to the zoo or park and I will let them play their imaginary games in the yard and not worry about depriving them. Instead I will remain confident that I’m enriching their lives by doing so.

Here are some links to articles that you might be interested in reading.

http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/child_too_busy.html


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**Digital Technology Parent Education Evening**

On Monday 16th March, the College is running a number of sessions on Internet Crime, Privacy and Security, Social Media and Cyber Bullying.

For more information, please see the link to the flyer below.

Digital PEE 2015.pdf

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**Six Things To Know About Teens**

The following article is taken from the Vital Staff newsletter

1. **The Eyes Will Tell the Story**

If you want to know how a young person is really feeling, carefully (i.e. CARE fully) observe the eyes. Those that sparkle will reveal a very different emotional state to those that are dark, sad or dull. Before you make any judgement about what is happening with a young person or how you should respond to them, spend time taking in the meaning of the story that they eyes tell. As Charlotte Bronte wrote in Jane Eyre, "The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter - often an unconscious but still a faithful interpreter - in the eye."

2. **Anger Can Be a Compliment**

At our Year 12 Parent Information Evening every year, I offer a piece of advice that is greeted with quizzical and uncertain looks. I ask parents of Year 12 students to train themselves as follows - "when your Year 12 son or daughter is standing there, screaming at you - stop, take a breath and say to yourself that they are paying you, their parents, the ultimate compliment." Usually at this point, my credibility is disappearing in front of me. However, I explain that parents are the ultimate safety barrier and a young person would never act like this in front of their friends (for fear of rejection). Parents are many things to their kids, including a sponge when life gets too tough. We should never
forget that anger is an emotion that is fuelled by fear.

3. Nothing is More Important Than Family

Sometimes it might not feel like it but the importance of family does not change for teenagers. However, the relationship will experience differences that can often be a source of tension as they will usually revolve around one or more of the following issues - independence, friends or choice of decisions. Sorting out these things for a teenager takes time and involves an element of trial and error. Family is the support system for an adolescent who is no longer a child but is not yet adult. Young people really benefit from knowing family "have their back" even if they don't always take advantage of that support.

4. Speak Well of the School

Teenagers spend most of their day at school. Whilst they might want to whinge about it, it is a different matter when adults criticise their school or their teachers. Kids are smart enough to know that they should be making the effort to get on top of any such difficulties. It does them no good when key adults in their life belittle the school and the people that they send their children to every day. Wellbeing comes from being able to find positives in difficult situations. Kids know that, adults should be mindful of it.

5. Success is ALWAYS the Preferred Option

Nobody enjoys failure, especially a young person. The relationship must never focus on what they are doing wrong. It should always be about how to do things the right way.

6. The "Panadol Effect of a Cuddle

When it all goes wrong for a young person, a cuddle from a parent or sibling might not solve the problem but it will provide some relief from the pain - the Panadol Effect. I do not recommend you test this theory in the school car park!