

From the “experts”

Going to our “experts,” Parenting Paradox asked our panel of college students what they felt was essential to their success in college. While we received a variety of responses, one stood out as a motto not only for parenting but also for life:

Be sure to take breaks and avoid burnout. Have fun at least once a day and give your mind a rest. student, University of Pennsylvania



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Work Hard, Play Hard

Sometimes a rainy day is a gift. Sometimes being snowed in for two days is the best thing that could happen. Why? Because on these days, we have nothing to do. We can't go anywhere. We can't do anything. Practices are cancelled. Games are cancelled.

Homework is distant. And if you're lucky, the internet is down.

This is often the time when our kids start waxing on about being bored. Why are they bored? Because they are so used to having things to do, things that are scheduled and planned. But these moments of boredom (their word, not our word) are exactly what our kids need.

Anxiety, Stress, and Depression

Research tells us that children are experiencing anxiety, stress, and depression at higher rates than seen in past generations. Research also tells us that moderate stress and scheduled time is perfectly OK, and even considered healthy. However, when our kids don't have PDF, their perspective regarding stress and their ability to navigate conflict can become skewed. When the balance is off, kids show increased irritability, which can impact their friendships, their family life, and their overall ability to be cope with the bumps in life. Every challenge feels like a crisis. Every disagreement has the intensity of Fight Club. And life itself can become overwhelming.

Benefits of PDF

Often, parents believe if their child isn't playing an organized sport, doing homework, working with their personal trainer or tutor, staring in the school play, going to dance class (the list could go on forever), then their child isn't maximizing their potential. On the flip side, parents worry that if their child is just "hanging out," not doing anything (or at least anything adults deem meaningful or productive), this is wasted time. However, that isn't always the case. PDF allows our children to:

- pursue their own interests
- find value in doing "nothing"
- cultivate their imaginations
- discover their passions
- reflect on their lives

In fact, when our children (and adults) have time, free time, to relax, reflect, absorb, we tend to be happier.

PDF: Playtime, Downtime, Family Time

One of the founders of Challenge Success, Denise Pope, explains that playtime, downtime, and family time (not screen time) are essential for kids of all ages. She emphasizes the importance of a balance between children's scheduled time and their free time. In young children, for example, one hour of scheduled dance class should be matched with one hour of completely unstructured PDF. For teenagers, PDF might look a little different: time hanging out with friends or just lying around should match up with the amount of scheduled time they have. For parents of young children, promoting and protecting PDF is a little easier. For parents of teens, equal "scheduled" and "PDF" time may sound impossible. With the onslaught of homework, practices, games, clubs, performances, etc. PDF sounds like a thing of the past. Without PDF, however, children of all ages can show a decline in creativity, critical thinking, and wellness.

What parents can do:

- Reevaluate how you view downtime. Recognize that PDF is not the same as being "lazy" and won't result in your child becoming an unmotivated adult.
- Examine the activities you schedule for your child. Be honest. Is your child over-scheduled? Does it take 2 parents and a paid adult to get this one child to all of his activities?
- If needed, which activities can you eliminate? Try cutting back 5% of their scheduled activities. When this season ends, be sure to reevaluate before "signing up" for the next thing.
- Try to regain an additional hour of PDF three days a week for your child.
- Have "no activity" days throughout the month for the whole family.
- Observe what you model as an adult. Does your child see you have periods of down time, or do you schedule 26 hours of responsibilities in a 24-hour day?
- Do a little pre-planning. Organize the craft drawers, game closet, or toy room before increasing PDF. Helping your child easily find the tools will make them more excited.