

## **The importance of after-school Activities in a Child's Life**

Some parents don't make it a priority to encourage their children to take part in after-school activities. But activities outside of school can be highly beneficial for your children.

After-school activities may have several benefits, including:

- Building self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enhancing social skills
- Teaching sportsmanship
- Providing exposure to other cultures and people
- Improving time-management skills

Young children who take part in after-school activities will develop better social skills. This leads to improved conflict management and better school attendance. Middle-school aged youth who continue to participate in after-school activities are more likely to be engaged in school and attentive in class and less likely to be involved in violent behavior at school.

Participation in after-school activities continues to be a benefit for student's right through secondary school. Adolescents in after-school programs are optimistic for the future and have more interest in school than peers who are unsupervised after school. After-school activities can include time for career exploration, skill development in a specific area and internships to prepare them for college and work.

### **Choosing an after-school activity for your child**

After-school activities should not become a burden for children; they are meant to enhance their knowledge and build their characters. A child should not be overly tired as result of these activities. If an after-school activity starts interfering with school work or takes up so much time that that the child doesn't have time for other family members, as a parent, you may need to cut down the number of hours the child spend on it.

To choose an after-school activity for your child, you may wish to ask these questions:

- What are the child's interests?
- What is the child's age?
- What are his/her abilities?
- How much time does this activity take?
- How does the activity fit in with your own schedule?

Children's after-school activities should match their needs, interests and abilities, and of course fit into their parent's schedules as well. The guide below may help you to decide how much is too much for your child, but remember that each child's tolerance is different. One child may be able to handle only one activity, whereas another child may be able to participate in three.

**Kindergarten-age children:** Your child is just beginning to learn to interact and get used to discipline. Her/his after-school life should be simple and carefree. One or two classes per week are usually plenty to start with. Try a trip to the library or your favorite book shop. Later on, you can look for more challenging activities like a music or art program.

**Children in year 1:** One or two activities per week, including play dates and playground visits are recommended. Some experts suggest that it is best to avoid competitive sports activities at this age, as children may still be too young to have to worry about winning and losing. After the rigors of a full day at school, a young child in year 1 needs a healthy outlet for pent up energy. Physical activities and non-competitive sports may be the best options.

**Children in year 2:** At this age, experts consider children to be old enough to voice opinions on what activities they want to take part in. Children may choose football, ballet, swimming or other activities. Many children begin lessons on a musical instrument around this age.

**Children in year 3:** Socialization begins to take center stage at this age, so team sports may be a good choice. For developing motor skills, painting, drawing and dance are good options. Experts suggest that parents should allow their children to explore their own areas of interest, making that there is enough time for family-oriented and unstructured fun activities.

**Children in year 4:** At this age, children know what they like and what they don't. It is also a time when social pressure is beginning to build. Encouraging children to get involved in after-school activities that they enjoy and that will help to boost their self-esteem is important. Parents may also need to help their children to manage their time in terms of after school-activities, homework and unstructured fun time when they are in year 4.

**Children in year 5:** At this age close parental supervision is also needed to keep after-school activities and schoolwork in balance. Experts suggest that parents should keep one or two days free for family time and other activities. Year five children may also be mature enough to get involved in community service.

### **Children in Middle School**

Although children in middle school may be more interested in watching TV and playing

computer games, experts suggest that parents should encourage their children to engage in after-school activities that reinforce learning. A child's academic performance can be improved by taking part in an EFL club or a chess clubs. Up to 20 hours a week of extra curricular activities should be more than enough (and not too much) for most middle schools. However, it is important for parents to keep in mind that each child is an individual - what's good for your child's best friend may or may not be the right for your child.