

JUGGLING YOUR KIDS AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

By Lydia Mockensturm

Feel like you're being pulled in opposite directions? You're not alone. Read on for advice on managing the after-school activity madness.

MANAGING ACTIVITIES

1. HAVE A SUPPORT SYSTEM.

Having a network of support can be sanity saving for busy parents—whether this means asking for help from extended family, forming a carpool group for soccer practice, or connecting with other parents.

"Connect with other families who have kids the same age," says Susan Richardson, a high school social studies teacher and mom of four. "But also connect with people who are older and can relate to all of the challenges you've gone through or will face."

2. SET BOUNDARIES.

To avoid burn-out, set boundaries as far as what you're willing and able to commit to.

"Carefully consider the teams and activities you are saying yes to," Richardson says, who at times finds the amount of travel that her older kids do for sports to be too much.

Dr. Syma Dar, a psychiatrist with Cleveland Clinic, suggests picking activities closer to home when possible. "Sometimes you have to turn things down," she says, adding that something else will come along.

3. PLAN AHEAD.

It may take a bit of trial and error to find what works for your family.

"We have a giant dry erase three-month calendar in our kitchen," Richardson says. "When my husband first bought that, none of the kids had cell phones so I referred to it often. Now, we text reminders and schedules to the three oldest (kids)."

Ed Gallagher, Director of Education at Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood, recommends looking at your schedule and finding where you might run into trouble.

Ask yourself if you can make it from point A to point B safely and on time, he says,

"and be prepared so that you don't leave a child waiting too long or arrive late frequently." This is where asking for help from family members might come in handy.

4. DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS.

While it may seem like other families have it all figured out, Dar says to be mindful of how you measure your success.

"Don't fall into the trap of comparing yourself to others and what they are doing," she says.

Gallagher adds that it's important not to get too caught up in what you see on social media, since most people don't share their struggles or how they make it all happen.

"Instead it may just be the curtain call photo, the big game photo, or something along those lines," he says.

HOME LIFE

When you have a full schedule of activities after school, meal planning, housework, and finding a moment to relax might seem nearly impossible. But taking shortcuts whenever possible and letting older kids chip in can go a long way.

Dar recommends using a slow cooker and planning meals at a time that works for you.

Likewise, Richardson uses her mornings to catch up on housework and get things organized for the day.

"I try to make the most of my mornings," she says.

If you're struggling to find time to connect, make the most of family time, as rare as it may be, says Richardson, adding making it a rule not to have phones at the dinner table and talking to each other about your day.

"But most importantly, don't be too hard on yourself, your partner, or your kids," she says. "Enjoy these moments while they last because they'll be gone before you know it."

