

Nobody's Perfect:

Finding Balance in an Overscheduled World

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Pressure on Parents

- Pressure on parents to provide their children with every opportunity
 - Setting the stage for success
 - Keeping up with the Joneses

Data suggests... Children with parents with more education and higher family incomes = Busier



Pressure on Kids

- Pressure on children to excel across areas
 - Grades, Popularity, Athletics, Musical abilities, Clubs and activities, Service and volunteerism, Getting into the best college

3 primary ways children become involved in activities:

Personal Interest

Parental Suggestion and Pressure

Desire to be with Friends

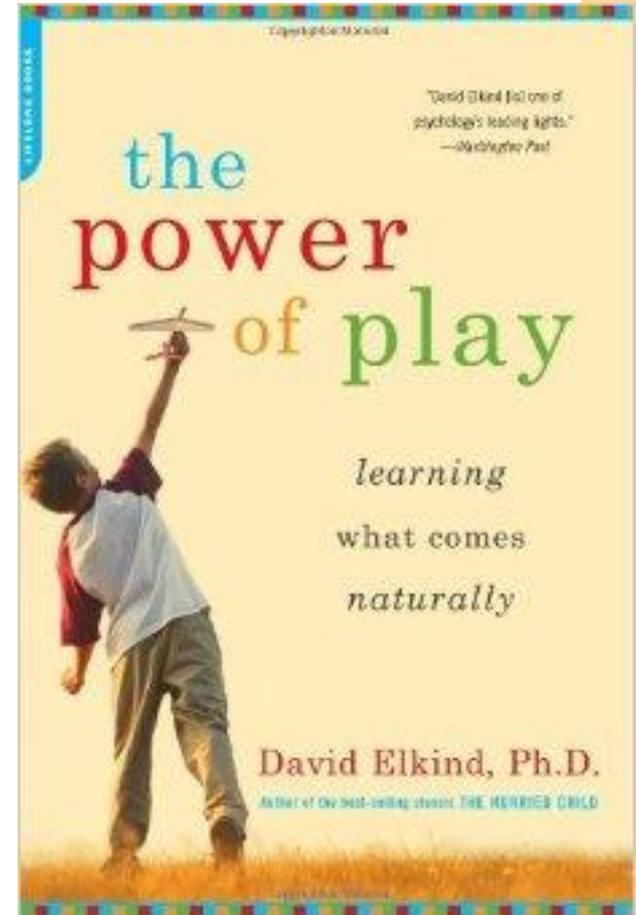
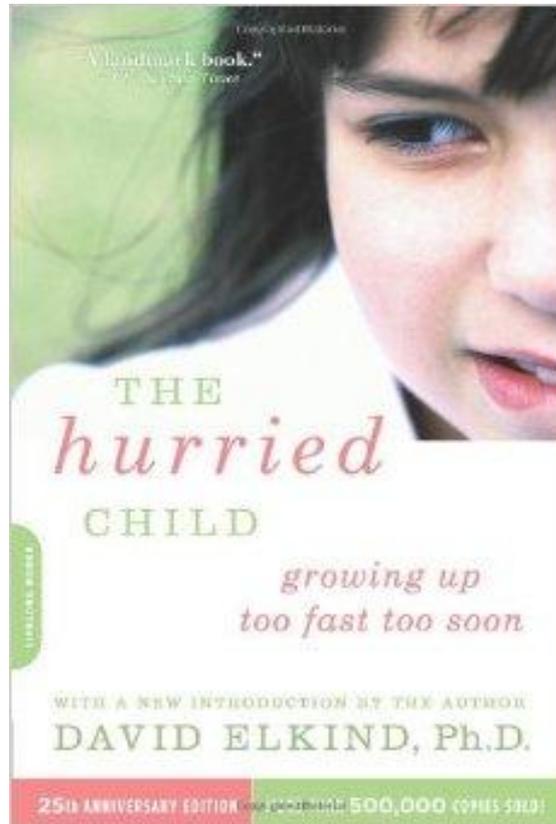
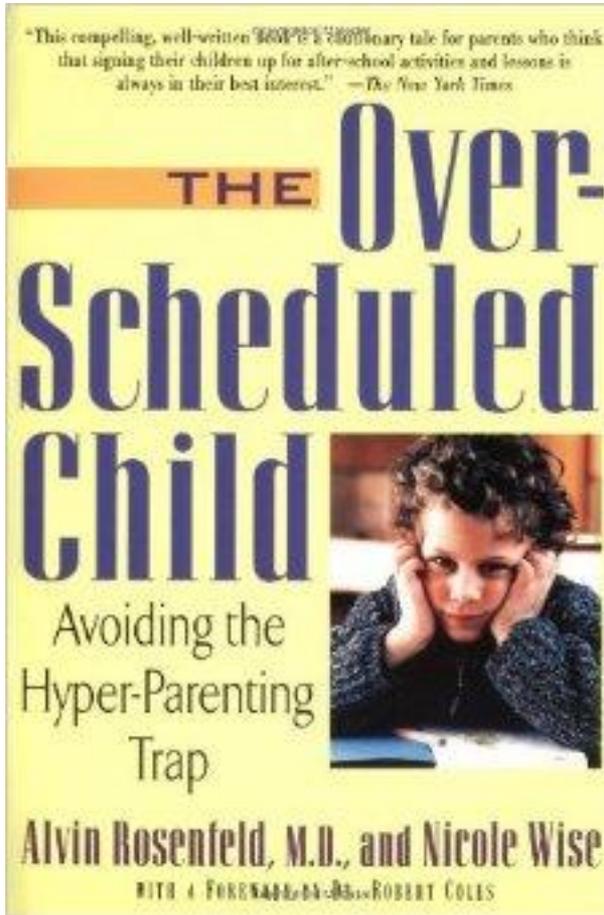
How children initially become involved may affect their willingness to participate and their experience of the activity.

Benefits of Extracurricular Activities

- Better grades and higher test scores
- Higher educational attainment
- Better school attendance
- Higher self-concept
- Less substance use
- Fewer behavior problems
- Lower rates of school dropout
- Less delinquency



Too Much of a Good Thing?



Hurried Child Syndrome

(HUR.eed chyld SIN.drnm, -drohm) *n.* A condition in which parents overschedule their children's lives, push them hard for academic success, and expect them to behave and react as miniature adults.
—**hurried child** *n.*

- Substantial research on the positive aspects of activity participation
- Almost no empirical evidence for the stress and strain part of the hurried child hypothesis

Hurried Child Syndrome????

- Study after study found that stress symptoms are highest for the UNINVOLVED children, in no study has the “hurried” child evidenced more symptoms of stress.

The least active children across several studies (ages 9-12) exhibited more symptoms of withdrawal, inability to get along with others, and low self-esteem.

Overscheduling Myths

- Myth: All kids today are overscheduled
 - Only 60% of kids participate in any extracurricular activities
 - Fewer than 1 in 10 children is “overscheduled”
- Myth: Involvement in extracurricular activities has a negative impact on family well-being
 - Involvement in extracurricular activities is related to many positive outcomes for youth and families
- Myth: You can't have too much of a good thing
 - 20+ hours per week and/or 5+ activities can have negative consequences for children

Benefits of Play and Unstructured Time

- Unstructured play time and opportunities for creativity are beneficial to kids across the age span
 - Important for learning, developing sense of self
- Toddlers and young children: child-directed play, exploration
- Middle childhood: developing individual interests
- Teens: stress relief, independence

Striking the Balance

- Kids don't come with an instruction manual
- There is no "right way" to parent
- Each child's optimal level of involvement and stimulation is different

Tips for Striking the Balance

- Choose the “right” activities for the “right” reasons
 - Activity that is motivating for child
 - Opportunity for child to shine
- Don’t be a helicopter parent
 - Hovering, overinvolved
 - Children need freedom to explore, stumble, learn
 - Overinvolved parenting is related to higher rates of anxiety and depression and lower rates of self confidence and self esteem

Tips for Striking the Balance

- Schedule activities as well as down time
 - Post a schedule of activities to help stay organized
 - Make sure there are open times on the calendar too – creativity, exploration, relaxation are equally as important as structured activities
- Make sure kids are getting enough sleep
 - Most kids need 9-12 hours of sleep per night depending upon age
 - Many kids, especially teenagers, do not get enough sleep
 - Say goodnight to electronics
 - Sleep routines are critical for all ages (e.g., go to bed at the same time, create a relaxing routine, unwind by reading, listening to music, writing in a journal)

Signs that Kids are Too Busy

- feel tired, anxious, or depressed
- complain of headaches and stomachaches, which may be due to stress, missed meals, or lack of sleep
- fall behind on their schoolwork, causing their grades to drop
- Lack of time for family and social interactions