



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of second-grade students

Choices of Children

Parents want their children to enjoy a variety of experiences and, therefore, need to provide opportunities for trying different activities. When your child develops an interest in something, it most likely will take more of his or her time and focus, at least for a while. Parents can use the child's interest level with an activity as a gauge to decide whether to promote an activity or end it.

Children sometimes are expected to follow their parents' footsteps or try certain activities because their parents didn't have the opportunity. Sometimes parents push academics, athletic skill or music. The activity becomes so serious that little thought is given to enjoyment. If the pressure becomes too great, children may drop the activity completely for fear of disappointing their parents.

Parents need to remember that every child is unique. Differences in children should be expected and accepted. Children of baseball fans are not all natural athletes, and coordinated parents may have awkward children. And just because a child is of a certain size or quickness does not mean he or she should be expected to excel in or enjoy a certain sport or activity.

Many children in second grade will be drawn to the types of activities in which their friends or peers are involved. Parents have the responsibility of making the final decision about their child's involvement based on their family's values and resources.

Actual time, transportation and money need to be considered carefully before registering for any activity. What are the lessons a potential activity is teaching? Depending on the adults and other children involved, the lessons can be positive and affirming or negative and rejecting. Be prepared to step in and check it out, especially if you sense the child doesn't want to continue the activity. Watch and listen for cues from your child.

Even praise can be overdone. Try using descriptive praise such as, "I noticed you caught the ball using both hands and brought it right into you before starting down the field." This shows the child you were really paying attention to the specifics of their skills. It also affirms that the child did it correctly.



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Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Reading something enjoyable can be a great stress reducer. Age-appropriate cartoons, comics and graphic novels can be good ways to get reluctant readers to start reading on their own. Check out your local library together.

Descriptive praise carries far more meaning than the standard “good job” type of empty praise that requires little effort to deliver. Likewise, promising rewards for achievements is not always necessary. Rewards could give a message to a child that the activity itself will be no fun, so more is needed. Rewards also may make the goal appear to be perfection. Learning and fun should be the goal of activities.

So Much to Do

Excluding time spent eating and sleeping, your child has roughly 90 hours a week in which to do things. Subtract another 50 hours for school, homework and chores, and this leaves your child only 40 hours a week for everything else.

This means you need to help your child choose which activities are most important, meaningful or enjoyable. Exploring choices means parents can help their child in identifying, thinking about and evaluating each choice. This is different from giving advice or telling the child what to do.

Consider how to spend available free time. Decision-making steps can include:

1. Together list your child’s interests on a piece of paper.
2. Research what type of programming is available in your area. These are your “alternatives.”
3. Now consider all of the “consequences” of any particular decision. Include the benefits – what will be gained – as well as the costs such as money, time and travel required, or things left undone.
4. Talk about the positive and negative aspects of a choice or activity. Consider how lessons learned might shape future choices.

INTERESTS	ALTERNATIVES	CONSEQUENCES (both benefits and costs)
Swimming	Swimming lessons	Pro – Learn to swim, good exercise, drive = talk time
		Con – Travel 20 miles/week, \$50 fee, need to leave at dinnertime

Parent(s) and children should listen to each other, accept each other’s feelings and work to determine the best plan of action. Maintain good eye contact, show interest, stay positive and encourage your child to explain their thoughts and reasons. If your child says they want to be in a structured activity in the next county just to have time with a friend, consider setting up a weekly play date rather than paying for lessons the child doesn’t really want and won’t really net them time to play.

Exploring alternatives and consequences works because it motivates the child to carry out the solution, helps to develop critical thinking skills and shows that the choices we make always have consequences.

When families lay a foundation for this type of work and mutual understanding by exploring choices, recognizing limits, resolving differences and making decisions together, parents and children learn to understand each other and feel good about themselves.



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