

Extracurricular activities – warning signs of doing too much

by Yolanda Janse van Rensburg © September 2013

Trying to do too much especially when children are still very young, is so easy to do whether or not it is in fact beneficial to your children. There are so many activities out there it is overwhelming to know what to choose and not choose. Often mothers do not want to ‘lose out’ and in the process overburden themselves and their children to too much, causing stress and frustration for all. I have, at some stages, found myself overburdened with activities and my husband has sensibly caused us to re-evaluate what we are doing.

Some of the warning signs included :

- There was **no real interest** in the activity, and no motivation to learn or practice
- **I had to continuously motivate** and encourage, especially when the activity required practice on your own eg. music lessons
- The **routine at home was affected** – we did not come home early enough to prepare healthy dinners, so fast food became the norm
- When we got home from an afternoon filled with activities, we were all **tired, hungry and irritated**, and not motivated to do chores required at home
- Me and the children became **tired** over time, as we had been travelling nearly every day
- **Travelling expenses** became high, and we had to ask ourselves whether this is really worth it?

When choosing extracurricular activities for your children it is better to evaluate them against your own vision and goals you have for your children, before making any decisions. Some of the questions one may ask include:

1. *Is it in the interest of child* - This is the most important question I asked myself. Is the activity in the interest of my child, or stated another way – is my child really interested in this activity ? Some parents let the child do the activities that he or she couldn't do as a child. So the parent want to live his/her dream through their child's life. But that is just the wrong step to take. The focus should be your child. Your child is born with his own God given talents. Sooner or later after much time and money spent the child will eventually loose interest. So why not spend the time and money in the first place on your child's interest. Only do the one activity that the child really wants to do and do it well, in contrast to putting all the time and energy in all the unnecessary activities you *think* the child would like to do.
2. *Value* – how much value will this add to your vision for the child(ren) ? or to the vision you have for your family as a whole ? is it really building up your vision for your family if only one child benefit from one activity at the expense of the other

members of the family ? Is this adding value to achieving your vision ? or is just costing time and money without any real benefit ?

3. *Time* – can you really afford the time it will take for this activity i.t.o. time of day eg. Is it during a mealtime or when your child’s energy will be low? Will you end up in rush hour traffic to get home after an activity and will that be worth it ? or more importantly, how will it affect the season of life you and your children are in at the moment (maybe it is time for just taking things a bit easier, or resting from all to gain fresh perspective on what you really want to do)?
4. *Cost* – can you really afford this in your budget ? is it really in the interest of the child for some reason ? will it benefit more than one child ?
5. *Travel* –how much travel will be needed to get to and from this activity ? It is my experience that children don’t like to be lugged around in the car, especially if it is only one child’s activity and the others must wait with mom in the car....

To demonstrate what I mean let me share my personal journey... My son is only interested in reading books and reading and building everything to do with aeroplanes. But that didn’t feel right for me, since I reasoned that he must do some sort of activity. So I took him from one activity to another for many years. From gymnastics, cricket to art, drama, bow hunting and playing the clarinet. But nothing seems to interest him enough. He wasn’t enthusiastic enough about any of the activities. With much prayer and again my husband’s wise counsel, we decided to no longer take him to any activities. It was a big decision to let him go and do what he feels like to do. He is now allowed to read a lot and in the afternoons he spend his time on building model airplanes as well as working in the garden on some projects.

My daughter is another case to study – she is a horse addict. Since she was able to speak all she wanted to do is to ride a horse. But it also did not feel right, so I took her from one activity to another for many years...and soon she also let me know all she wants to do is horse riding and to be a professional show jumper one day. So now we have invested heavily in this interest, and this is where she spends most of her time - with the horses she loves. Even though she only has this one activity that takes all her time and energy, there is no complaints, no motivation issues and no stress anymore.

So - a good rule of thumb is to limit yourself and your child to one cultural (art, music) activity and one sport activity. This rule will keep you in check most of the time and you will find it extremely helpful to remember this when you are tempted to do too much. Take time to think clearly what is beneficial for your child, and your children together and what extracurricular is in his/her interest before making any decisions. Also remember that no activity has to continue forever, so there may just be a season or a time for doing something and then it can be stopped.

As homeschoolers we are in the privileged position to not pressure our children to perform. Let us not make the mistake now and pressure our children with too much, too soon. To quote the Moores “If a pressured child ever turns out to be well balanced and happy, he is the exception that proves the rule.”