



Our first Lower School ParentNet meeting of the year was held in the Farmhouse on October 26, 2017. We had a great discussion on the following two topics:

- ❖ Navigating between extra-curricular activities while maintaining a sound life balance
- ❖ Peer influences and its impact on core family values

Navigating between extra-curricular activities while maintaining a sound life balance

Situation: My son comes home from school mentally exhausted, and needs some downtime in order to re-charge after a hectic school day. However, he has soccer classes or other such after-school activities that prevent him from getting back into his steady state. At the same time, as a parent, it is tiring for me to maintain a family rhythm with this much driving around. How do others achieve a healthy balance between school, activities and family time?

Discussion:

Honor what kids are wired for. Some kids enjoy more activities, other kids need more downtime between school and activities. Some need a strict schedule, while others need more flexibility. A single model may not work uniformly across all children.

Control the pace. In many households, moms are responsible for maintaining the family rhythm, which in turn effects the home mood. If things get too hectic, it is on us to slow things down (which may be to reduce children's activities) to avoid running on empty. This helps both the child and the parent. One of the moms discussed the challenges her son faced in managing homework together with the pressure of daily practice of multiple instruments to keep up in class and for performances.

Don't sacrifice on family time: Making memories is important and this typically happens during downtime – with family and friends. One mom re-collected that the best part of growing up was the hours spent with her friend enjoying old picture albums. Too many structured/scheduled activities can get in the way of this.

Spending less time on some activities may be OK: It is good to accept that kids will not be champions in every activity they pursue. Sometimes, spending less time on an activity once a week will kindle a lifelong interest, rather than a short-term “win” with aggressive multi-hour weekly practices. What is more important? One of the moms noted that her dad would learn swimming as a child for just 30 minutes a week in a well in a remote village. He could only do this a few times a month, and yet this developed a deep passion for swimming to the extent that 60 years later, he still swims every day (now in a swimming pool...).

Sacrificing downtime for perfection can be problematic: The pursuit of perfection at the expense of downtime can have unintended consequences. One mom mentioned that her completely scheduled child who made a single mistake in a spelling test found her writing that word twenty times to make sure she didn't make that mistake again. Some kids take it too hard on themselves in order to be perfect at everything they do. When there are a few activities, that can work – but if there are a lot, it can become stressful.



Peer influences and its impact on core family values

Situation: *Different families raise kids with different values. Some children are raised without much exposure to video games, while others are heavy gamers including playing first-person shooter games. Some children are allowed to have a phone and many gadgets, while others restrict access. Some parents talk actively with kids about disturbing events, such as the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, while other parents prefer not to bring up these topics with their children. Yet, as the kids grow up together in the melting pot of the school environment and neighborhood, these family values collide, and it isn't clear how best to steer your child to not lose your core family values.*

Discussion:

Lead by demonstrating your family values in front of your child's peers: Kids need to see their parents be effective in enforcing family rules with their peers as well. One of the moms mentioned that for her daughter's birthday party, she had everyone put their cell phones in a basket! The result was kids learning and playing new games (poker), and a realization for her daughter that you can follow the family values while still having fun with friends. In effect, this mom was able to graciously and calmly influence kids around her to respect her family's values.

Encourage independent thinking and be adaptable where possible: Describe your set of family values to your children, and encourage a debate on those values. One of the moms noted that her son really wanted to play a certain video game, which conflicted with one of their family's values. She encouraged a discussion on the topic, and her son persuaded her to change her opinion after he showed the pros/cons behind his thinking. Such a discussion ensured trust and honesty in the family as well.

Celebrate other's possessions and successes: It is a tough, but helpful trait to encourage your child to be happy about a possession (such as a video game console) their friend acquired, but they didn't. One of the mom's noted that in her family, she never felt compelled to give similar privileges to different kids, instead expected her kids to be content with the privileges they had, while celebrating the possessions of others.

Don't be afraid to say no: In the end, parents know what is best for their child, and places where they can bend rules vs where they can't. One of the moms noted that most of her neighborhood kids were aggressive and rash, and it simply did not make sense for her child to engage with them. Consequently, she reduced the time that her child interacted with them.