

At Stonyhurst, sport and play are thoughtfully woven into the pupils' daily schedule



ASK THE EXPERTS

How can parents maximise their child's free time outside of school hours, during the evenings and weekends?

We ask five educationalists their advice...

OUR EXPERTS

Fr Christopher Cann
STONYHURST
ST MARY'S HALL

Heather Cavanagh
BURGESS HILL
GIRLS

Kate Enright
HIGHFIELD PREP
SCHOOL

Sue Faulkner
BOLTON SCHOOL

Pauline Wilson, MBE
URSULINE PREP SCHOOL

Sue Faulkner, Head of Primary Division at Bolton School, Greater Manchester

There's no question that access to a range of activities can be beneficial and enjoyable for youngsters, however when it's punctuated with stressful journeys across town and snatched meals, those benefits are quickly eroded. Agree what your child enjoys and is manageable, making sure that at least two nights a week are activity free to allow time and space to relax together as a family.

Taking an interest in your child's day is important, however picking over every detail can create pressure. Instead, ask what they enjoyed and listen without judgement or demand and allow them space to think it through for themselves.

Finally, clear and calm bedtime routines should always be a priority as it is during sleep that children's brains and bodies are able to process the day and recover, setting them up in a positive mood for the new day ahead.



Outside of the classroom, Burgess Hill pupils spend time with school dog, Jasper



Bolton School has a vast range of extracurricular activities for children to enjoy

MAKE SURE THAT AT LEAST *two nights a week are activity free* TO ALLOW TIME AND SPACE TO RELAX TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Heather Cavanagh, Head of Prep, Burgess Hill Girls, West Sussex

A tip for parents is to park farther from school during drop-off or pick-up times and take a short walk together, even if walking the entire way isn't always possible. This brief stroll can create valuable moments for preparation or relaxation before or after school, fostering a relaxed environment for children to share personal thoughts.

While after-school and weekend clubs are excellent opportunities for advancing your child's skill development and to cultivate a healthy lifestyle, I particularly recommend clubs like Beavers, Brownies, Girl Guides, and Scouts. These offer vital opportunities for social and life-skill enhancement in a less competitive, more relaxed setting than some sports or dance clubs.

Lastly, Burgess Hill Girls consistently emphasises the benefits of outdoor time, promoting physical and mental health, as well as providing a refreshing break from daily demands, regardless of the weather.



Highfield Prep's pupils are encouraged to unwind and enjoy unstructured outdoor play

FOR CHILDREN OVERWHELMED BY THE *pressures of the school day, practising some mindfulness activities* IS A GREAT WAY TO HELP THEM DECOMPRESS

**Kate Enright, Deputy Head,
Highfield Prep School,
Harrogate, North Yorkshire**

Let them play. Let them relax. And, above all, give them the time and space to be bored. It's so tempting to fill your child's evenings with a variety of activities and to keep them as busy as possible at all times. But children, just like adults, need time to relax and recalibrate in the evenings. Giving children time to explore unstructured play allows them the opportunity to learn and practise social skills, problem solving and resilience.

For children who feel overwhelmed by the pressures of the school day, practising some mindfulness activities is a great way to help them decompress. Blow bubbles together, colour in a picture or just quietly list the five best things about their day. Clearing their heads and giving them the space to relax will pay huge dividends when they're calmer and readier to face the challenges of the next day.

Read them stories, talk about their day and let them get bored!



Stonyhurst St Mary's Hall timetables plenty of field-day action to keep children engaged

**Pauline Wilson MBE, Principal,
Ursuline Prep School,
Brentwood, Essex**

We've always enjoyed clear communication with our parents. And from the children's first days with us, we've encouraged activities out of school that complement the work and pastimes they undertake here.

It's a vital part of the children's wellbeing and development that we work as a partnership with our children's families to support the child here in school and at home (through) the parents as necessary.

Reading is an integral part of our expectation when it comes to children's evening pursuits. This not only improves their reading ability but their communication, vocabulary skills and imagination. It gives both children and their parents time to sit quietly together, and to contemplate the day. This is proven to encourage good mental health and wellbeing.

We afford the children a wide range of timetabled activities, as well as extracurricular ones, and many of our children continue these pursuits in the evenings and during the weekends. Many even represent clubs regionally and nationally.

We appreciate the positive outcomes that we attain because of the continued mental stimulation and enrichment the children have while not in school.

**WE ENCOURAGE DAY FAMILIES
TO *follow our boarding routines of
limited screen time* IN THE EVENING,
READING AND SET BEDTIMES**



Dance is a popular after-school pursuit at Ursuline Prep



PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER TARRY/THE SUNDAY TIMES

**Fr Christopher Cann, Headmaster,
Stonyhurst St Mary's Hall
(SMH), Lancashire**

The days are long at SMH, but we ensure that the breaktimes are also long for all age groups. We've recently had a focus on Positive Play initiatives to help children to learn how to play, i.e. role play, traditional playground skipping, and ball games, with older children taking the lead in being playtime friends to younger children. We've extended sessions of outdoor learning either in our outdoor classroom in the Mission Garden or in our extensive woodland grounds. Most of us love being outside!

Our daily offering of sport and a very rich activities programme interwoven into the formal classroom lessons timetable ensures that the day is full of variety in learning experiences and pastoral times with bags of

fresh Lancashire air! Our activities programme is designed to be interesting and broaden pupils' horizons and allow for hours of fun at the end of the day. Examples include: archery, chess, French role play, horse riding, drama, musical theatre, tennis, swimming, and NFL football, and all the traditional sports.

Crucial to maintaining strong mental health, we believe, is our rule in having no phones. We encourage day children to stay for activities, "studies" (homework), and supper at school to ensure they have free time with family in the evening. We encourage day families to follow our boarding routines of limited screen time in the evening, reading and set bedtimes. Equally, however, we ensure that pick-up times are flexible and individualised, so that pupils can be collected straight after the end of lessons, if so desired. ☺