The Case for Slow: How to Create Meaningful Interactions and Avoid Over-Scheduling Your Family

Whether you work full-time or part-time, you know how quickly your day gets eaten up. Traffic snarls, emails, soccer carpools, and homework can reduce family time to mere minutes in the evenings. Our harried modern lifestyle often means we spend less time together, yet children’s need to feel connected and nurtured hasn’t changed. For healthy social-emotional growth, children need opportunities to relax and engage in meaningful interactions with their families each and every day.

At Bright Horizons, we understand how important family relationships are. Below, we offer a few tips for intentionally planning your priorities and schedule to allow for a slower pace.

- **Make meals a priority.** The dinner table has always been a gathering place for families – a time to nurture relationships as you nourish the body. Make a commitment to eat dinner together several times each week. Take a minute to set the table and sit down as a family. No need to prepare an elaborate meal. A deli salad and roasted chicken is just fine. What matters is using this time to reconnect. Keep a jar with thought-provoking questions, such as, “If you were an inventor, what would you invent?” close at hand. Ask your children what the best and worst part of their day was. Talk about upcoming events and goals, or read a chapter from a favorite book. A delicious meal and interesting conversation is an irresistible draw for children. Make the most of it.

- **Keep a family calendar and use it wisely.** Maintain a large calendar in a common area in your home. Assign each family member a color and use a marker in that color when writing family members’ information. In a glance, you can tell exactly where everyone is going and when. Be sure to include some “down time” in your schedule. If every square inch of your calendar is full, it’s time to pare back on activities.

- **Unplug and get comfortable with quiet.** Technology has become a way of life for children and adults alike. What would it feel like to be tech-free for a few hours every week? Commit as a family to put away the devices at least once a week. At first, you may find that you feel anxious or don’t know what to do next. Be prepared with some low-tech diversions, such as a puzzle, board game, or book. Sit on the back porch and talk, go for a walk, bake cookies, or pull out some art supplies.

- **Make time for volunteerism.** When you regularly schedule time to volunteer, you’re creating a family culture of intentionality. You’re sending the message to your children that “we spend our time and resources doing things that matter.” Volunteerism benefits the recipients of your efforts, of course; but it also has long-term benefits for families because it offers protection against the excesses of media and consumerism that are so rampant in our culture. Visit Doing Good Together or Bright Horizons Foundation for Children for volunteer opportunities.

- **Individual time.** Consider spending individual time with each child once a week or once a month. During that time, don’t check your texts or make or receive any calls. Your child gets to decide (within reasonable limits) what the joint activity will be.
It may be challenging to schedule if you have multiple children, but it is worth it to your child to set aside 30 minutes or an hour to do this periodically. If you have a parenting partner, maybe you can each schedule individual time with your children at the same time and then switch the next month.

We live in a go, go, go world, but we can choose to step off the race track. Decide as a family what pace feels right for you and actively protect your family’s time together. Many families reevaluate and adjust their priorities as children get older or their lifestyle changes. Maintaining a realistic and comfortable activity level improves relationships and ensures your children’s healthy emotional growth.