



## **Let Kids Play for the Right Reason**

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It's news to no one that today's families are busy. In most families, both parents work outside the home. During off hours, most adults spend their time running from one errand or event to the next. Children have their homework and sports and other extracurricular activities. Add church activities, and try to count the hours left to spend as a family.

It's easy to see how the family evening meal has all but disappeared.

The truth is, the average American family is stressed, and it's time to take a deep breath and answer some vital questions.

Is our family too busy? If it is, why? What can be eliminated?

Parents need to make some hard choices for the sake of the family. If they don't, the developing pressure will carry over into all of the family activities and nobody will be able to relax and enjoy any of them.

This is especially true for kids who are pushed and pulled from one activity to the next, rarely having downtime to relieve the pressure. It's a shame, because the reason they're supposedly doing the activities is to have fun.

That pressure may be why so many kids are quitting sports at such early ages. The statistic I think can't be mentioned enough comes from a Northeastern University sportsmanship study, which showed 70 percent of youth sports participants (ages 5-18) quit by age 13.

It amazes me so many kids are quitting sports before they really get going, before they really understand what the games are all about. Why does this happen?

First, many kids are forced to specialize and pick one sport. Sometimes, this occurs when families are trying to simplify their lives – but in reality end up complicating things more. Sometimes it's the coaches who feel year-round practice and commitment leads to better results.

These coaches insist that kids work on one particular sport, even after their regular season is finished, making the seasons seem year-round. It's unfortunate, because this prevents physical, mental, and emotional recuperation.

Even professional sports have an off-season. When there's no down time for a kid, he or she gets burned out, leading to injuries and boredom on the field, and frustration at home.

Then, there are the parents who are trying to live through their kids. Their intentions may be good, but their "support" puts tremendous pressure on the kids. Parents try to emulate professional coaches in the name of bettering their kids' skills, and the game becomes all about winning.

Is it really enjoyable to have to be the best, to have to win all the time, to have to take the sport seriously every minute to show your commitment?

Is it enjoyable for adults when their boss is that demanding?

Walls of resentment get built that are hard to break through, and the next thing you know, the child wants to quit.

Parents need to think about sports from the child's perspective. The motivation for kids playing sports should be enjoyment, making friends and learning valuable lessons.

When the stress levels get too high at home, parents should ask themselves if their children are playing competitive sports for the right reasons.

Are they playing in the right type of league? Find out the philosophy of the coach. How often will they practice? How much will each child play? How important is winning to the coach?

When parents get all the right information, they can make better decisions – decisions that will determine whether sports have become too much.

Keeping youth sports in perspective will allow families to be families again.

And who knows? Maybe they can sit down for that wonderful experience called an evening family meal.