

# WHOLE CHILD SPORTS Q&A

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**QUESTION:** *What can I do about the erosion of family time?*

*Our kids love playing team sports. We shuttle them from practice to game and back again and just don't seem to have time together as a family anymore. We don't even get to have sit-down meals together. **I feel like I'm losing touch.** Is this just me not wanting to let go?*

## **DISCUSSION:**

Not at all. **What you are feeling is quite natural.** It's exhaustion, or at least weariness. **It's nostalgia for something quite legitimate—a moment or hour when your family can bond, when there's no going to or coming from anything.**

Just being together. Just being. Your lifestyle, jam-packed as it is with activities and sports-parenting commitments, has become overwhelming.

**We are under so much pressure to stimulate and entertain and engage our kids.** We want them to log hours of great experiences, learn new skills, become physically and socially confident and adept. So we insert them in sports programs at the tender age of four or five or six, and once we are on that treadmill, there's no getting off.

**Countless parents have told us that they are exhausted, physically and emotionally, by the efforts they make scheduling, driving to, coaching, and/or team managing at youth sporting events.** One mother admitted she secretly prays for rain—as her son and daughter lay out their uniforms the night before games in eager anticipation—because that would mean the onslaught of commitments would grind to a halt and the



family could share quiet indoor time together.

### **SOLUTION:**

**Children's involvement in sports should be a pleasure and a privilege. We'd like to make the case for less is more.** When things get too crazed, cut back. Simplify. **You can exchange the gift of participation for the gift of anticipation.**

Luis Fernando's sons are good soccer players, and they clamored since the age of nine to play on travel teams. They were drawn to the excitement of playing in competitive tournaments against challenging opponents, and, of course, they *really* liked those cool travel uniforms! It was quite tempting to sign them right up, but rather than cave in, Luis Fernando assured them that they would get a chance when they were a little older. This built up interest and excitement, and bought time to allow them to hold on to childhood a little longer. **There is nothing wrong with delayed gratification, with having something to look forward to, with saying, "not right now."**

**Scheduling can certainly be a nightmare, but sacrificing family dinners and other bonding experiences like relaxing family vacations (and just about every weekend and most holidays) to participate in practices, games, and tournaments is not the best way to build strong, lasting, healthy family ties.** That's why taking a season off can be so beneficial. If you have two or more kids, time it so that they all take the same season off from sports. **"Can you can provide your family with windows through which to reconnect: activities that include everyone and have no competitive thrust to them.** We've said this before, but it's worth saying again: Try simpler things like a family hike, an all-day fishing trip, or an evening spent working together on a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Such activities are shifts in rhythm that draw families closer and restore balance and flow.

Kim wanted to make sure that his daughters understood all that goes into signing up for multiple afternoon activities, so he had them take out paper and markers and draw up their own detailed schedules. They were instructed to include the time it took to get ready and drive to and from activities. Then

the family sat down and reviewed everything to see what was do-able and what had to be put off until more life space was available.

**Balance, like the perfect hook shot, is elusive. You have to work at it, and often parents have to impose it.** We can remind ourselves and our kids to slow down, take a deep breath, and exhale slowly. Everything doesn't have to be done right now. It's important to schedule breaks; real downtime; time for rest and creativity to balance activity. ***We can't always be doing. We need to exhale, too. We need quiet time at home, together.***