

# Overscheduled and Stressed

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I do appreciate everybody who is here tonight or who is listening to this podcast feeling like it was easier to work in little snippets of the podcast here and there while you're driving kids around to activities or therapies or tutoring or whatever. Because oftentimes I think our lives get very busy and it is hard to carve out time for improvement or trying to solve problems or trying to prevent problems. And sometimes I think when we get in this over scheduled stressed mode, we're just kind of like putting out fires like they say. You're just kind of getting from one thing to the next and maybe not feeling very good and maybe not feeling very calm, but you don't feel like you have the time to actually sort through it and try to make it better. So thank you for taking the time tonight or as you're listening to this, to try to come up with some strategies for making it a little bit better.

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So first I want to say when we were talking about this presentation, we were kind of structuring it from the standpoint that we are oftentimes very busy shuttling our kids around to a variety of activities, whether that's sports or therapies or tutoring or music lessons or scouts or whatever. We've got a lot of structured activities that our kids are doing. We ourselves maybe have busy schedules with work and parents meetings and various activities that we need to do or like to do. And a lot of times you might find in various interviews or articles or books -- people lamenting about how kids don't have enough unstructured time, or they don't have enough free time.

And I think there is something to that. We have a lot of structure to our kids' day-to-days. And I want to focus a little bit on some of the benefits of structured activities. So I don't think -- I'm not here to say that structured activities are good or bad... "you should sign your kids up for a bunch of stuff" or "don't sign them up for things."

There are definitely benefits of having our kids in structured activities so they're exposed to a wide variety of activities interests they can explore, figure out, you know -- how do you know that you are really a talented musician unless you are put in front of an instrument at some point, right? Or allowed to play with materials in a way that's musical. If you're interested in it and you're curious and you test it out and you keep going and you keep going, that can really develop into something that's either a lifelong hobby or some sort of skill or a career path. You can learn a lot about yourself. But if you're not exposed to it, you might not have the opportunity to find that out about yourself or to get that experience.

So that's definitely a benefit, opportunity for enrichment or enjoyment or pleasure. And I say this because there are a lot of kids that I work with who spend a lot of time in school. Children. Kids. They spend a good part of their lives in school. And for some kids that is not the highlight of their day. They don't necessarily enjoy being in school.

So sometimes these activities outside of school give them something fun to do, give them a bright spot in their life. I work with plenty of kids who actually are not very successful in a school setting. Maybe they're the kids who are always being redirected or always corrected or they're in trouble or something, but maybe they really shine in some other setting. A kid who's constantly being reprimanded for being too loud might really do well as a drummer, you know what I mean? Or running around. A kid who's constantly out of their seat in the classroom might be a very talented athlete and they can be seen as a leader in that setting.

So giving people opportunities to put themselves on different stages so that they can highlight their strengths is really a gift for people and for you as a parent to see your kid in a different setting. If you're a parent who your stomach clenches before a parent teacher conference or like when you get an email or you just don't ever really know what this feedback is going to be because your kid maybe is getting in trouble or has problems throughout the day, it might feel really good for you to watch them in a different setting where they're shining. So, these are good things.

We also know that structured activities can be very helpful for increasing social network and relationships. And I don't just mean kids making friends with other kids, although I do think that is important -- because sometimes at various stages of your life -- like middle school comes to mind -- that sometimes it's really nice to have a network of friends outside of the people you go to middle school with. If there's a conflict, if there's some sort of drama. It's so nice to have a social network outside of that where you can kind of escape from that scene and have a whole other group of people who, like you, care about you, get along with you, you've got a shared activity. It's a support, right?

But then also exposure to different adults who might really show an interest in your kid or care about your kid, help them promote their strengths and things like that. So you now have a network of people, a whole team around your kid.

We can talk about things too, like the benefits of just exercise or mental or creative stimulation. I think there are plenty of people, not just kids, but we lead, many of us, pretty sedentary lifestyles. And I think that for a lot of us, our default, especially like in the wintertime, is you come home from school or work or whatever and it's very easy to just kind of hole up inside and go on your phone or watch a show or whatever and not get a ton of outdoor time or exercise. So, some of these activities, the structured activities, even if it's not necessarily like sports or something, but maybe even just like an after school care program that your kid goes to after school and they've got an additional recess, that's more time that your kid might be outside running around getting movement.

The default "sitting down and watching a show" -- my son is ten and he used to spend a lot of time building and doing Legos and things like that. And I think some of that was like before he knew that he was actually even allowed to or could turn on a TV by himself -- or he didn't have a password for an iPad or whatever. Now that he can do some of those things on his own -- it's almost like he needs a reason he's not going to come home and necessarily start building with Legos or run outside and play. He might sit down and watch something or go on his iPad, but if that's not available to him and something else is

put in front of him, he'll spend hours and hours doing something like playing with Legos or drawing or whatever.

So sometimes it's almost like a push, you know, to get them to be doing something besides sitting and watching a show or playing a video game.

Moving into the next point, that time away from screens. Which is sort of related, I think. Sometimes we're not stimulating ourselves from a creative standpoint or a physical standpoint because we're kind of just going into a default of watching something or being on a screen.

Sometimes structured activities serve a very valuable or fills, I guess, a valuable need right in a space that it's childcare. Maybe you're not able to get home until a certain point of time and there's an option to sign your kid up for young artists or builders club or Legos club or whatever after school. And so that works out well because you're not able to pick them up until a certain time. So you've got childcare and a structured activity, it kind of serves a couple of purposes there.

And then an opportunity to build skills. So skills that are related specifically to whatever that activity is, whether we're talking about a musical instrument or if we're talking about like the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, even things like camping and building fires and tying knots and very specific skills, but then also things like social skills, right? And even things like trying something new, maybe not being very good at something and having to practice and work at it and develop a skill. So sort of that goal directed behavior. We've got opportunities to develop those skills.

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So when we're talking about if we're thinking about, I guess young kids and kind of in theory, in concept, wouldn't it be nice to just expose them to a whole bunch of stuff when they're younger, these low commitment? Oh, you want to try out basketball. It's this four-week basketball program for four- or five-year-olds. Okay, that's a low commitment. It's four weeks for like an hour, one day a week maybe. It's not a huge cost. It's like \$20 or something. That's a low cost, a low commitment. "Great, I'll sign my kid up for this thing."

Low investment in terms of your time and your resources. Maybe you don't have to buy tons of equipment for it or whatever. You don't have to buy a tuba or something like that. You want to expose them. Let them try these things out.

And ideally, these are activities that are developmentally appropriate and offer developmentally appropriate instruction. So if you're trying to get a younger kid, a preschooler or a kindergartner involved in something like a three hour piano lesson is probably not developmentally appropriate, right? Like, these are 15 minutes of trying something. It's got to be active. It's got to be fun, it's got to be hands on. They're not going to want a lot of instruction about things. If it's a sports-related kind of thing, don't try to teach them about out-of-bounds and off sides or anything. Just let them run around.

Don't have them waiting in line. Don't have them standing around listening to a bunch of instructions. Just let them move, right? So these are the kinds of things that ideally, in theory, that's what would be great. And then you let them try out the soccer and Legos and gymnastics and piano and coding and hockey and swimming and ceramics and Scouts and cooking and karate and theater and science camp.

And over time, they're going to develop some of these. You think that you're going to develop some priorities, right? Like, oh, they show an interest in this, or we really like this one, two or three activities, and it's just going to sort of neatly unfold, and a bunch of these things are filtered out and your kid's left with a few to focus on maybe scouts and piano and gymnastics. And that's not too crazy, right?

Except for your kid is into gymnastics -- and so they've got their normal gymnastics class, but now they're also talking -- one of the coaches says, "hey, your kid has some real promise here. We've got this additional tumbling class that's on such and such date, and how about if you give that a try," and then it adds on and it adds on. It adds on.

And now the piano teacher, it's not just a lesson, but it's also trying to get your kid to practice. And they like playing the piano, but they don't really like practicing. So now you're like fighting with them about practicing. And then also the piano teacher doesn't just teach piano, but there's this whole fun little system where they go online and play these computer games to earn piano bucks, and then they can turn those piano bucks into prizes. And if they're not doing those things, the piano teacher is reminding you to remind your kid to sign on, to just... Right??! (laughter from audience)

It becomes a lot, right? And it's not just the time in practice and games. It is the apps that you have to sign up for in order to get your kid's schedule and for people to communicate with you if there are changes, if a practice is canceled. But now you have to wade through 37 messages on a group chat where you find out about other kids -- other people's kids are going to be late to practice because you've got to pick up your other son somewhere else. And then other people are saying, "oh, by the way, good job at this," or "go so and so", and you're like, "but what time are we supposed to be there? I can't find the important information!" And that has taken up how many minutes of my time reading through all of that?

## **Slide 5**

And that's one kid and that's one activity, right? So the more kids you have, the more activities, the more it feels like that book -- if you give a mouse, what is it? "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," right?

It's like if you sign up for an activity, they're going to want more, right? And more and more and more. And it can very quickly get out of hand, right, and feel like you can't say "no," right? And what are the reasons why people feel like they can't say "no?"

Your kid might love everything, right? They are like, "oh, could you sign me up for this? Could you sign me up for that?" And you don't want to be this parent who doesn't let your kid have opportunities, right? You're the reason why they're not going to make it in the world because you said "no." They can't do that cooking class or whatever. You don't want to hold your kid back. They love doing all these things.

Or maybe it's almost the opposite, where your kid doesn't want to do anything, and so you feel like you're forcing them to do things because they would say no or they'd want to quit something or they don't want to do anything, right? So it doesn't unfold neatly like that, where they develop this focus and they have a couple of hobbies or activities that they like to spend time, and sometimes they just want to quit everything or they want to sign up for everything and it doesn't filter out or it doesn't remain.

There are so many opportunities, I guess, where you're getting a flyer home from school that somebody could sign up for something or somebody's -- their friend's parent texts you and says, hey, "I'm going to sign so and so up for this invention camp. Does your kid want to do it?" And you're kind of like -- requests are coming from everywhere. Your kid might be making requests. These businesses and organizations are making requests for more and more and more of your time, your kid's time, your money, right? You're just inundated with these opportunities, and some of them sound really cool and like, you would want to give this to your kid, but how are you going to fit it in? And how are you going to maybe multiply that times everybody in your family?

Something that has its own slide a little bit later and we'll talk more and more about this -- but that gets in the way -- are things like parental fears and worries and guilts and hopes and dreams.. Yours? Maybe your partners? Maybe even your parents or other people who are really involved in your kids' lives? But things like "I don't want my kid to miss out on something." Or "I feel like I want to say no to this extra skating lesson, but it seems like everybody else on the hockey team is doing it. And so if I don't sign my kid up for it, everybody else is going to be way -- they're going to improve, and my kid's going to be left behind."

"And I don't want my kid to feel bad that they're not improving, and I guess I better sign them up for the skating class" or "I really don't want to spend my weekend at these tournaments" -- or whatever, but if I say "no," then we can't really be a part of this team. And my kid likes the sport, but we just don't want to have it to be like a full-time job. What's in between?

Or you worry that maybe your kid is maybe your kid won't be able to fit in if they're not doing something, if they don't have an opportunity to try something.

Or maybe you feel guilty because this is your third kid and you were really involved with your older kids, or your older kid got to try out cooking and all these other things, and your youngest kid just kind of gets signed up for whatever is convenient because their siblings are doing it. And so then you feel guilty that, well, they never really asked to do Scouts, but, like, their dad's a leader, and their older brother goes, so it's just a no brainer that I'm going to sign this kid up for it. They don't really want to do Scouts, but they've been asking to do karate, so maybe I should do the karate, right?

So you're feeling guilty about that. Maybe you've got hopes and dreams, like you just think something sounds like so much fun, or they'd be so good at it, or you really love doing it, and you want to be able to let your kid do that.

Logistics. So just trying to get people places can interfere in all of these plans. And as I mentioned, sometimes that also plays a role in, well, we might as well sign this kid up because we're already here for this kid or that kid, so we might as well add this one on. But then again, if you give a mouse a cookie, it becomes more and more and more.

And then there are things like tutoring and therapies and doctors' appointments and orthodontist appointments and all these other things that are either regularly scheduled therapies or add-ons -- those appointments that maybe come every once every three months or something like that.

But you got to have room for that. And it's not just having room in your schedule for it, but it's thinking about your kid, what your kid is like and what their day is like. And so if you've got a kid who's in school all day, and maybe they're a kid who doesn't love being in school all day, so that's not necessarily the highlight of their life. And maybe you've got a kid who doesn't love sitting in one place for very long, but now they've been sitting in one place in school, and your kid would really like to just not have to do anything. But you've got speech therapy.

Your kid's got to go to speech therapy or occupational therapy or something like that because you and their team have decided this is important and they need this. Or maybe they've got -- dyslexia comes to mind because there are a lot of reading programs that are pretty intensive for kids, and that's like, as a parent, you feel like, if I don't do this, my kids aren't going to be able to read. This isn't about my kid being a soccer player or a drummer.

This is about reading. And this is pretty important. And it's maybe four or five days a week after school for however many hours of doing more stuff that my kid doesn't like to do.

So you don't really want to add anything else on because you feel like they're already so busy doing all this stuff, you want to give them downtime, but then you might feel guilty because they don't have anything fun in their life. So then maybe you want to try -- and it's just this whole, like, what is the right decision? What is the right thing to do?

Finances, of course, play a role in this because most of this is not free. Most of it isn't cheap, right? And saying no to a part of it or some of it or all of it, that adds to the guilt too, right? Maybe I could write this check, but then what does that mean I can't pay for? Or how much stress is that going to add to our overall life if we're paying for something that now you're not just paying for that activity, but, oh, you need a new instrument, or, oh, now we're doing a tournament and we need to pay for a hotel room. Or, oh, now we're supposed to pay for this dinner or this whatever, another uniform. It's like add on, add on, add on, right? And so maybe you could swing the initial registration fee, but then to keep it up, it's like more and more and more.

Now this is kind of what I feel like when people take very expensive trips to Disney or something and they've spent thousands and thousands of dollars and their kid wants to play in like a puddle on the

sidewalk and you're like, "get up and enjoy this vacation! Do you know what I did?!" Right? It's not all that enjoyable when you know how much money you spent on something, it's like you got to make the most of this and this is a puddle and we've got those at home, right? So then if you are spending thousands and thousands of dollars for your kid to play some sport, you want your kid to be like – "you've got to practice, you got to train, you got to do this outside right now."

It's not fun for your kid. It's a job, right? They got to earn it. And then sometimes that pressure can lead to other kinds of issues, right? Or like you've decided, well, we spent all this money on it because I think my kid's going to be able to get a scholarship or it's going to pay off later or something. Well, I've worked with a lot of kids who are like, I don't want to do that activity anymore. And I'm afraid to tell my parents because they tell me all the time how much money they put into this. That's a lot of pressure, right?

And then of course, good and bad experiences. So sometimes kids maybe really like some type of activity, but maybe there are other kids in that or other adults, the coaches or the instructors or whatever who just aren't a great fit and it's not a great experience, so maybe they don't want to do it, but then you're like but we could try over here or this -- A friend of mine said they've got a den over here and the leaders are really great about this or that or whatever.

So it's like sometimes you feel like an activity is going to filter out because maybe it's not a great fit, but then there's this possibility that it's not the activity. It was actually maybe something about that specific place or people who were doing it. Let's try it over here -- so it doesn't actually get crossed off the list. Right?

## **Slide 5**

There we go. Okay, so I just want to make sure I didn't skip anything here. What I'm going to tell you is there is not one right way. There's not, "this is the psychologist-recommended way to not mess up your kids." They should have this number of activities or this number of hours or you're a bad parent if you don't do this, or if you do do this, there is not one right way for you or your family or your kid.

Also, what's right for you today might not be what's right for you tomorrow or next year or was right for you last year. So that changes, right?

And what works for some of your kids might not work for all of your kids -- if you've got more than one kid in the house. What works for your kids might not work for you, right? Like you might be somebody who does not want to leave your house much. And you've got a kid who's like go-go-go, right? And that's hard too, because that adds to the guilt, right? Like, I don't want to do this, but now I feel guilty because it's me that's getting in the way of my kid doing what they want to do, so maybe I should do it.

So you're now driving them around to go-go-go when you're not a go-go-go person and you are not happy. And so you might be a cranky version of yourself because you're having to go-go-go when you really want to be alone, be at home, not be talking to people, not be driving around, whatever. So that's

not great either, right? So we have to be thinking about how it all fits together for each other and for your family and just over time.

## Slide 6

So I can't tell you one right way, but I want to give you some things that you can think about, that you can consider, some approaches that you might be able to take.

And one thing that I think is important, not just about being overly scheduled and stressed, but in general when you're making decisions for your kid, for your family, for yourself. I mean -- these are things that I work with adolescents about in their therapy too -- is if you can really start to think about and try to identify and discover and explore some of your core values, which are different than goals.

So values are maybe I'm not sure that aspirational is the right word, but values are sort of like guiding principles. It's almost like your mission statement, right? It's sort of like the direction that you want to head in, but it's not something that you're ever going to be able to just cross off your list. Like that's done, right? It's not a one and done sort of thing. It's like choices that you make repeatedly to head in a direction of not necessarily achieving but living your life in a certain way.

Goals are more like you can cross it off the list. You did this. It's an action step that you can take and you can accomplish or not accomplish it, right? But you can try to accomplish it and you might cross it off that list. Values are more like this is what's important to us as a family, this almost like process as opposed to outcome, right? So kind of thinking about for your family or for yourself or for your child, what are some of the values that you can look back on that might help you make some of the decisions about what you say yes to and what you say no to.

Those values might be things like connection with each other, right? So you might really value that as a family, you are connected to each other. You spend time with each other, you have conversations with each other, you know what's going on, you play games together, you sit and watch TV together. But there's a connection there. Some families will say, "I don't know the last time I had an actual conversation with my kid because..." maybe we're driving around somewhere, or there's another kid in the car, or I'm doing this, or I'm running somebody over here. There are a lot of families who've got their kids involved in activities where the partners -- both caregivers -- will say it's just divide and conquer. We don't really ever spend much time together because we're having to do, "you take this person, you take this responsibility, you do that, I'll do that, that we're never really together all as one."

Maybe that's something if that's one of your values and that's something that you can fall back on as you're identifying "do we say yes to this or do we say no to that?" And considering strengths and weaknesses and patterns for your kid, for yourself, right? So you might have a child who gets super excited about -- they hear somebody does a presentation about fencing, or somebody comes in and plays -- the school will come and do, like, a meet the instrument sort of -- middle school might come to the elementary school and your kid's like, and "I want to try the tuba. That looks awesome."



But that same kid might also be the one who's like watching a TV show and somebody on the TV shows a rock climber and they're like, and "I want to try rock climbing" and that kid wants to try this, and that kid wants to try that, and that kid will try everything. They're like an explorer. They are adventurous, they are open to new experiences and that is a strength. But if you take every single thing they say, "I want to do this" and you research it and sign them up for that, you're going to go broke and you're going to have zero time, right? You won't possibly ever be able to keep up with that.

If you've got a kid who never wants to do anything, maybe they get nervous about trying something new but you know, like oh yeah, they complain about it, but once they're there they really have fun. They really like it. I think I just need to kind of push them a little bit because once they're out the door, they're happy. But if I say, hey, do you want to do this? They would say no and complain. But then once they're there they're really happy. That's good for them and blah, blah, blah, blah. So kind of recognizing this is who this kid is. They've got a tendency to get real excited and then not really want to follow up on anything or never want to try anything new. And so that might help you decide whether and what you decide to put in place for them.

Under what conditions does your child seem to be at their best or at their worst? So if you've got a kid who, like I'm saying, doesn't really love school necessarily because there's a ton of instructions to follow and a ton of having to be calm and having to sit, maybe the very old school, conservative piano teacher, like, "why aren't you practicing? I can tell you didn't put time in practicing. You need to be quiet and calm and disciplined" kind of thing. Maybe that's not the best fit for your kid. Maybe it is a good fit for your kid, but maybe your kid has to be involved in some kind of activity or would benefit from being involved in an activity where they can be a little bit less sedate, they can run, they can be louder, they can be active, right?

So we're thinking about those kinds of things and also being realistic about the logistics and the restrictions and timing and expense and things like that. You can take these values and kind of, like, develop some guiding rules for your family. I'll tell you that my parents, when I was younger, my sister and brother -- we were kids. My dad really, really wanted, and this is his hopes and dreams, right? Top Gun, the original, not the remake, was very popular, and he loved the scene where Goose is like playing Great Balls of Fire and could just play the piano like that.

My dad was like, "I always, always wanted to be able to play an instrument, and I never did. And I just want my kids to take three years of an instrument. And then after that, you get to decide if you want to keep doing it or not." And my great grandmother or grandmother, somebody sent a piano that was in the family. And so my parents had this piano, and we all had to take piano lessons for three years. Not in the summertime, just in the school year. And then if we wanted to do it longer, we could, or we could quit. And that worked out pretty well. I think my sister quit after three years. I think I quit after five years. I think my brother quit after three years, but it was fine. We all kind of learned how to read music, whatever.

So I thought, Well, I'm going to do that same thing with my kids. The piano that was in my parents house was sent to our house. I'm like, I'm going to do the same thing. All three of my kids are going to do piano

for three years. And then my older kid hated piano and hated all of it. And I felt like I was back in piano lessons. Like, "oh, yes, I'm very sorry. Yeah, no, I think they got their practicing in." Like, meanwhile, I'm lying to the piano teacher because I'm like a child again, lying to my own piano teacher about pretending that I practice. Right? And so she hated it. And then it was time for her to go to fifth grade, and there was an opportunity for, like, orchestra, and she wanted to try out the viola. And I was like, well, you did do two years of pianos. I guess it could be just three years of an instrument would be good. Okay, so yes, you can take the viola, and that will be your third year.

And then after that, you can decide. And then my middle kid loves music, so she takes a million. She's like, she loves music. That's not something that I would have to say you can or can't do. And then my son decided to try drumming and never ever practiced in between, which I don't actually care that they don't practice that much, but never ever picked up those drumsticks. And so I would drive him. And then I found myself having to figure out, okay, how is he going to get to his drumming lesson? Oh, shoot, I'm going to have to get a babysitter or something I'm going to have to do.

And I realized I am arranging my work schedule around. My seven-year-old going to take a lesson for something that he doesn't care about enough to practice in between, and I'm paying for it. And now maybe I'm paying a babysitter to drive him there and all because I had in my head that my kids were each going to take an instrument for three years. And then I was like, "do you want to keep doing this or you want to maybe get something else to try? Would you rather just come home and relax a little bit?" Like he's my kid who is a couch potato. "Then you probably just want to relax, right? Or should I sign you up again?"

"I'll come home and relax."

"Okay, if that's what you want."

Right. We change, right? So sometimes you can have guiding rules, things that you think are probably good ideas, and you put it in place, right? If it is something that is working for you and that you think is a good idea, well, then you make that your family rule, right? Like, everyone's got to take a lesson first.

If it's not working for you, you can absolutely say, "you know what, I really thought that was going to be a good idea, but I see how we might need to make some changes with that rule," right? So use it to help you and then change it. If it's not helping you, it's okay to do that.

But some families will say, especially if you have kids, that you might need to kind of push into certain things, right? Like, okay, well, we want you to do one thing that helps with your brain or your mind or your creativity or whatever. And we want you to do one thing that helps you practice, like teamwork or exercising or something like that. So you can have some of these, "these are things that we think are important and we want you to kind of check off something in this box and something in this box."

But looking at that sort of day view, that week view, and thinking about, you know, what if your kid is very busy with something that you feel like they don't necessarily love doing but that is important, like some kind of therapies or tutoring or something like that and they want to relax and they want some downtime, do not feel like you need to sign them up for other things that they're not going to be happy about going to that's going to stretch you and stress you out. You don't have to add that to your plate.

You can think about other ways to do it. Like maybe there's a lower intensity, sort of like give it a try, a six-week thing as opposed to signing up for a whole season. Or maybe that's something that we can do in the summertime and not over the school year when we're taking something else off your plate. So thinking about how do you not just look at everybody around me is signing their kids up for this or that and my kid's not doing that now, I need to add that to their plate. But sort of thinking about over the course of their day or their week or their month or their year or their life, what are the things that we want to put in place that line up with our values, right. And that line up with our priorities and being okay with saying no to certain things.

One of the things that I have here is that remembering now is the reality and later is a possibility, not a guarantee. So I think when parents have a lot of fears and worries about things, it's like if my kid doesn't do this now, they're not going to be able to do it later when they might want to do it because everybody else is learning how to do that now and they'll be so far behind later. There are plenty of people who pick something up later in life and it doesn't get in their way that they didn't do it when they were younger. Right?

There are also plenty of kids who are doing something when they're young that they stop doing when they get older. Right? There are plenty what people are doing now and what you're worried about may or may not happen in the future. The future is the possibility. Don't treat it like a guarantee that if you sign your kid up for this extra gymnastics thing and this thing and that thing, because their coaches, when they're ten, say they really show some promise and they've got some talent. That does not mean your kid is going to get a scholarship to college. It doesn't mean -- maybe there's a possibility there. But sometimes I think we act and make decisions like that is the truth, that's gospel or something. And so I've got to do this because if I don't, then they're never going to become this Olympic gymnast because they really have a shot at it. Well, no, maybe they show some talent or some interest or something like that, but you can -- right now is happening.

So if you're like arranging your work schedule around getting your kid who doesn't even want to go to drum lessons to get to -- that's what you're dealing with now. Maybe if you let your kid quit drumming, he's never going to become a famous musician or something like that. Maybe, but who's to say that he would ever become a famous musician? What I got to deal with right now is the nonsense that I'm living through. Right? And so does that make sense right now?

## **Slide 7**

Okay, so before you say yes to these activities, I would encourage you to ask yourself or have a conversation with your partner or even with your child, "what is the point?" Not in a facetious, rude, sort of

what's the point of doing this way, but more like, "why are we signing you up for this?" So I joked and said that I didn't actually care that if my kids practice that much in between their music lessons. And I don't because I feel like that's one of those things that I did want my kids to have exposure to an instrument and to give it a try. If they don't like it enough to practice in between, they're going to feel that music teacher asking them, "hey, did you practice? Were you practicing? Doesn't seem like you're practicing. Well, we can't get to some of the good stuff."

They're going to have to deal with that consequence. I don't want to nag them about practicing. And if they love it, if they like it, if they're interested in it, they're going to pick up their instrument. Whether or not they're practicing what they're supposed to be practicing, they're going to spend more time in it. Right? I was very well aware that I was spending money on something that my kids may or may not take seriously, but I was okay with it because I thought that I wanted them to try an instrument.

I know a lot of people who are spending a lot of money on some kind of activity for their kid because they believe that their kid is going to be a star, is going to be a superstar. And oftentimes that is sports related that I think a lot of people are doing that and just a numbers game, right? But most people do not become star athletes even if they show promise when they're ten, right? That kind of filters out.

But if it's like, "I'm doing this because I want you to get an experience and have fun" or whatever, "I like watching you do this," great. Because you're not going to resent it if they're not practicing. You're not going to resent it if they're complaining about going. Right? But when you're, like, having a fight with your kid because they're not putting in the effort, and you're paying all this money, and you're taking all this time to drive them there, and they're like, "yeah, but I don't actually want to put in the effort. My friends are doing this, and this is fun. It's not a job," but if you're like but then "I don't want to pay, and I don't want to take you." If you're having a lot of fights like that, you really should be thinking, why are we saying yes to this? What do we want our child to get out of this? What does our child want to get out of this?

If it lines up, great. If it doesn't line up, then you might have to have a conversation. "Well, we love that you have fun doing this thing that's costing us thousands of dollars, but I'm sorry, we can't really afford for you to have thousands of dollars of entertainment. Like, we'll find something else that you have fun doing that we're okay with paying that amount of money," right? So if it doesn't line up, it doesn't mean you have to do it, but it just means that you have to kind of get that goal or like, what's the point? You have to sort of be on the same page about what you're expecting to get out of it.

Why are we saying yes to this particular activity? So I think there are plenty of times when we say yes to things because we feel like it's almost like we're not actually thinking about it, we're just doing it. People talk about eating, right, and that you might not actually be hungry, but if you're at a table at a restaurant and they bring out, like, chips and salsa or something, you're eating it. Maybe you're not even hungry. Maybe you don't even love chips and salsa. That's just there. It's convenient. It's, like, placed in front of you. So you just sort of do it. Maybe other people at your table are doing it. You just kind of keep doing it. So this sign up comes out, and you're like, "okay, I'll sign up for this" because it's placed in front of me,

and you're not really thinking about it, but actually stopping to make a decision -- yes or no for each of these activities.

If does saying yes to this mean we have to say no to something else? Like, what is it taking away from our family or this kid or me or whatever, or another kid.

Which of our values and priorities does this line up with? Is this activity in conflict with any of our priorities or values? So I know one of my friends is a youth minister, and he said he never let his kids play soccer because all the soccer games were on Sundays. And he's like, our family goes to church on Sundays. "That's just what we do. We're not going to not do that. So we don't sign up for activities that take place on Sundays. It just did not in line with us as a family," right?

So they made a decision. They made a conscious choice, and it helped them figure out, what are we saying yes to and what are we saying no to? As opposed to just doing it.

And thinking about what are the benefits and the costs of saying yes to this. So what does that mean? I'm going to have to do? My kids going to have to do? What does that mean for our family as a whole that other people, if you're saying yes to an older child and you know you're going to have to be driving them there, what does that mean for the younger child? Are they doing a lot of driving around, sitting in cars, things like that? Fine. Maybe for some kids or maybe for some families. Maybe fine in some cases, but maybe it's really hard in other cases. So kind of thinking about that whole big picture.

## **Slide 8**

When to say no. If any of the answers to those previous questions make "no" the obvious choice, say no. Right. It is okay to say no to an activity or a coach or an instructor or by the way, I'll speak for me as a psychologist, as a clinician, when we're trying to figure out our follow up appointments. When to schedule the next appointment -- I try to give people kind of a range, and I'll say, I would try to find an appointment in the next -- "we should probably meet in like two to four weeks" or something. This isn't "we need to meet next week" sort of situation, but I don't want too much time to go by. But I mean, schedules get like whatever works best in that time frame, right?

Not all therapies are like that. There are some therapies that really need to be weekly or even a couple times a week. If you are feeling like this is too much -- and I know my kid might need this, but like, big picture, our whole family, our week, this is sucking up a lot of our time and a lot of our energy, and it's taking away from all these other things. It is perfectly okay to ask," is there a different way that we could do this? Does it have to be twice a week or every week? Could we spread these out?"

There's some level of stress that's being added, and we think about what is the added benefit? Sometimes people quote, unquote, prescribe the frequency of treatment because that's just what they've been doing. Or maybe that's kind of the ideal situation. It doesn't mean that it has to be. And I'm not suggesting that you go against what one of your child's clinicians is recommending. But if it is a stress for you, as a family, for your child, if they don't like going, if they complain about it, if it's like, "okay, well,

we've got therapy, plus the two hour fight that I have about going to therapy, plus the night before when they're trying to get out of it," plus whatever.

Are you getting enough benefit that the cost is all of those hours of complaining, fighting, whining, nagging, whatever -- are they really getting that much better? I would have that conversation with the clinician and the therapist, like, "can we work something else out? Or what does this have to be? Or here's what's happening on our side of things. Have we thought about doing this or that?"

Have an open conversation about it. Because what will sometimes happen is it becomes overwhelming. And so then people just stop. And stopping might not be the best thing, right? But sometimes you feel like it's stop or go. It's all or nothing, and there isn't anything in between. But if going -- if all isn't working for you, try to find out, is there something in between? What can we do to make this more palatable for us as a family?

And that would be kind of like the alternative, right? So if you know that your kid is somebody who likes trying out a bunch of stuff, but then they kind of fizzle, they get tired of it, they want to quit. They don't like it. I wouldn't sign them up for something that's like a year long commitment. I wouldn't pay to have the tuba, because you figure your kids probably didn't want to quit, right? And now you're paying this -- whatever. I would say, "well, maybe we could try, oh, I saw the libraries offering, like, free learn how to play a guitar thing. Let's try that out in the summer. And if you like an instrument, maybe we can think about it for next year." What is something that's a bit of a lower commitment or less of a commitment?

## **Slide 9**

When the answer isn't clear. So when you're not sure, should I push? Should I let them out of it? Should I let them quit? Is that something that people here have ever wondered about? Like, should I let my kid quit? This is miserable. They don't like it. I don't like it. This question comes up a lot. I don't think there's one right or wrong answer. I think it very much depends on your situation and your kid.

What I think is we don't necessarily want to develop a pattern of, "sign me up, I really want to try it. Nope. I don't like it. I just want to quit." That sort of in this moment, here's how I feel, right? But if your kid really doesn't want to do something and they're asking you if they can quit, I think that's an opportunity to say, "well, what is it that you don't like? Or what are the reasons why you want to quit?" And if it's like, "I just never have a single free night. Like, I just don't ever have anything", then maybe you can talk about, "all right, well, is there like maybe you don't have to go to both practices every week. Maybe you could just pick one night."

Now thinking about what are the consequences? Because sometimes if you're not fully committed to an activity right? So if it's like a sport, for example, or like a music kind of thing, if you're not here at every practice, you're not going to start or you're not going to get as much playing time -- go back to your values and go back to, what are we doing this for?

So if your kid is doing whatever the activity is, if your kid is playing baseball because they want to get tons of playing time and be the best player on their team, then making the decision to go once a week to practices and skipping one is probably not the best decision because they're probably not going to reach their goal of being the best baseball player on the team. If they're like, "I'm on the team because all my friends are doing and it's kind of fun" and they don't care about their playing time or their starting time, or they don't care enough about it to give up that extra free night, fine, as long as they're okay with that, you're okay with that. You know what the consequences could be. You can say not yes or no, but like, here's what we're going to do. Here's how this works for us.

But obviously there are a lot of conversations you can have about that at different times. If your kid wants to quit something because they're anxious, they feel very scared about it or nervous about it, I think depending on what you know about your kid, this might be a kid who feels nervous at the beginning, but once they get going, they're okay, then you might not let them quit. You might kind of push them through it, right? If you've got a kid who's got pretty significant anxiety and they're like having panic attacks and they're in this situation crying and melting down, and maybe they're old enough where it's kind of like stands out that other kids their age aren't acting that way, and you're like, "I don't want to put them in this position," right? Maybe there's something between just quitting or forcing them to go.

Maybe there's a "you know what? I get it. This is really hard for you but you also were interested in signing up for this. And I think that means that a part of you wants to give it a try. What if we let your coach know you decided you just want to check it out, so you're not going to come and you're not going to practice, but we'll watch. We're going to just hang out and watch from the sidelines or whatever. We're going to see what you think of it." So it might help so that you're not just like removing your child from that situation. You're pushing them, but pushing them in a way that they're more likely to get something out of it as opposed to become paralyzed with their anxiety. Right?

So sort of thinking about how you can do that. If they're having a lot of tantrums going to the activity, like behavior problems, they don't want to go. They're fighting you about it. I would again think about what is the pattern of my kid? Are they a kid who, when they're in what they're in, like -- transitions are always hard. When they're home and they're doing their Legos or they're watching a show or whatever, they don't want to stop and start anything. And so, of course you're going to expect that telling them to get ready to go leave the house and go do something else. You're going to have the same kind of reaction you might have when you're telling them to stop and get ready for bed, or stop and come to dinner, or stop playing outside and come back inside. There are some kids who have more trouble with that kind of transition.

So I wouldn't necessarily say, "okay, this is too much of a struggle for me. I'm going to let them quit or we're going to pull them out of it." But I would be thinking about, "what do I know about my kid and how this behavior fits in with my kid and what I know about this kid." If it's something really unique and really different, I would try to figure that out. What is it about this activity that is so different and that might be telling you, "I really hate it. It's like people are hitting each other. I don't want to hit people. I don't want people to hit me. This is not a good fit for me." Right? "I don't like it."

And that might be a time where you're like, "this makes sense. You're right." And you might decide, let's just "you got a couple weeks left, just keep going," right? Because you might decide, this is a kid who maybe really should be working on finishing what they start. Or you might be like, "you know what, cool. I'll let the coach know you're not going to be coming anymore, and we're not going to sign you up again". There isn't one way that you're going to mess up your kid and one way that your kid is going to be like a star perfect person with no issues. Right. You've got to figure out what works for you and your kid. But asking -- not making, like, a knee jerk decision, "okay, I'm going to let them quit" or not, but actually thinking it through. Why would it make sense to quit? What would happen if we quit? Why would it make sense to stick with it, and what would happen if we stick with it? What are those goals? Are they getting what we want out of it if we change it up in this way or not?

When you feel like you don't have a choice? So I think that there are times, like I was mentioning where it's like, "you know what? I don't really want to sign my kid up for this add on thing." Like they like it at this level, but they really don't want to do all these other things or "well, the therapist told me to come back next week, so I don't feel like I can say no because maybe that's what my kid needs and I don't want to be neglectful in some way or get in the way of my kids progress." It is okay to ask questions and to talk about it. It is okay to break it apart.

There are some kids who come to me normally when I work with kids, it's like a 50 minute appointment time, like an hour appointment time. But there are some kids who really don't want to come, and so we talk about "what is it that they don't like about coming?" Sometimes it's not at all what we're working on. It's more like, "well, because then when I come here, I miss out on playing with my friends, and I want to play with my friends," or "I forget that I'm supposed to come here. And so we make plans, and then when I get home, my mom says, nope, I gotta take you over to Dr. Barlow's."

And I now I'm so we talk about things like, okay, your kids coming once a month or so. Like, what do you think about scheduling it during the school day? Or, like, during you know, like some kids that's a lot more palatable for them when they can maybe get out of school a little bit early, come to the appointment, go home and do their stuff with their friends.

For some kids, that's not going to be a good choice because missing school is not going to be a good choice for them. Right? Or that that's not possible for the parents. That's not going to work for everybody. But it might work for some people. Sometimes we say, okay, instead of a 50 minute appointment, let's have a half hour appointment. Or sometimes it's like, "you know what? We're doing a lot of talking." I'm spending half of the appointment time talking to the parent, and the kid is waiting. Maybe we can have some appointments where it's just the parent and some appointments where it's just the kid. There isn't one right way.

If we break it apart and we go back to, why are we doing this? What is it for? What do we want to get out of it? It helps us sometimes look at different ways that we can keep this activity or therapy or whatever in as a part of our life, but not take over our lives or not feel like that activity is just -- we have no control over it. Once it'd like the mafia or something like, you're in, and then you could never get out. Right?



We don't want it to be like that. We want people to feel like they've got some choice in how they're doing it, what they're saying yes to, how much time they're spending in it.

And I talked about accepting the consequences of if you're sort of half in and half out, there may be some consequences. This is a common example that people bring up when we're talking to parents about behavior and consequences, because sometimes parents think like, "well, they know if they do this, I'm going to take away their phone, and they're still doing it."

How many of you drove here tonight? How many of you drive on a pretty regular basis? What are the consequences if you speed? (murmurs from audience)

You might get a ticket. Right? You know the consequence that if I speed, I might get a ticket. That may or may not change your behavior. Right? You may or may not speed, even though you know that you might get a ticket if you're speeding. Right?

So sometimes it's like, well, I've got to go to this, because if I don't, then my kid might not well, the drama teacher said if you're not here for everything, then you might not be able to get a lead role. Okay, well, why are you in drama? Oh, because it's fun, and all my friends are. Okay, so do you want a lead role? Are you, like, trying to be an actress and at the age of seven, you really need to make sure that you're not a tree you're instead whatever, Dorothy or something. Is it okay to go to most of them but not all of them, knowing that you're not going to get a main role?

For some people, yeah, maybe it is, because what they're trying to get out of it -- they get those needs met by going to some of it. Right. I got a kid in high school now. She's a freshman, and she plays sports. And it never occurred to me that we wouldn't be able to make plans for our spring break -- that there's a possibility that she would have to do.

I'm really sorry, but we're gonna especially after COVID I it's important to me that we do family things that we take time off, and if that means she might not be able to get as much playing time -- okay. We're going to have our family time. And I think those are decisions that are hard decisions to make sometimes unless you're actually putting it on paper and thinking about it from a different point of view, not in the middle of it. Right? You're not reacting in the middle of it to the situation, and you can reevaluate as needed, so you can keep asking yourself these questions.

## **Slide 10**

All right, so we're almost done here. But the parental stuff so those worries and those fears, what is it that you as a parent are worried about or are afraid of if you say yes or no for your kid doing this activity? Being able to actually recognize your stuff, your baggage, right? Like, how your own stuff is getting in the way of whether you want your kids involved in these things, don't want them involved in them. Say yes. Say no.

Put those fears and those worries and things like that on the table, right? So I've worked with plenty of parents who will say, "you know, I just feel like I quit everything. And if my parents pushed me -- and I regret it now, like, as an adult, I wish I stuck with whatever. And I feel like if my parents forced me to, then maybe I would have really kept that up or something." And so there's this, like, "I had this experience, and I wish it was different. And so I'm pushing my kids because I don't want them to quit and regret it later."

I don't have an answer for that. But I do know that understanding that's a part -- that fear rears its head in every little decision I make. When my kid says, "I think I want to quit, I don't want to sign up for that again." That fear that I have about, "is my kid going to regret it later? Are they going to be in their own kids therapy session someday complaining about me, that I should have pushed them more?" Right? That is a part of the decision making, and you have to understand that and recognize it and see that that fear is here at the table -- like a speeding ticket, right? You know, that that is sort of a part of it. I could do this, right?

This fear, this worry is here as a part of my decision making, whether or not you let that sort of carry more weight than, okay, now I'm having to hire a babysitter to get my kid who doesn't care about this activity to this place, and they're having tantrums about it.

You can weight that fear, that worry, differently than what makes sense, than -- what my kid wants to do, - - than the sort of situations where they do better and where they do worse and what their doctors are recommending for them. You can weight those pieces of information differently.

The hopes and dreams. So obviously doing the same where you're recognizing it. You're recognizing it at the table, but also thinking about who are these hopes and dreams for? So if you're like, wow, my kid is talented in whatever area -- some sort of music or something like that. "Or I was an Eagle Scout, and I loved it, and that was so important to me, and I want that for my kid. I want them to have that feeling. I loved it. It was great for me."

Or "I get so excited watching them shine in this sport" or whatever. "They're good at it. They like it. I love playing that. I want to do that. I'm excited about it."

Of course. And that's being a parent, right? You want good things for your kid, and you like to see them in that, but sometimes that clouds what is actually good for your kid or what they're telling you or what they want, and sometimes that's that living vicariously, right? And putting some pressure on your kid to do what you would have done if you could have if you didn't have to put, by the way, the risks or the effort or whatever into it.

Like, one of my daughters is the talented musician. She's up there on stage, she's singing, she's playing an instrument. I have, except for that five years of piano lessons that my dad forced me to do, which never I mean, I can't play Great Balls of Fire. There's a piano right there. I'm not going to be able to play that for you, even though I took those lessons.

I love going to see musicals and plays and things like that. I get chills. I love it. I have no talent myself, so I get really happy watching her do those things because it's almost like I kind of get to experience it through her, right? If she stops liking it and I'm just like, then I become a stage mom, right?

Then it's like, I want her up there because I want to be up there, and I'm too afraid to do it, and I don't want to put the work into it. So I want her to put the work into it, and I want her to be brave and to do it right. We got to think about who it's for.

Breaking apart again, the guilt, what you've got time for, what you sign up for, what the older brothers or sisters did, what other kids in the class are doing. Break it all apart and figure out, okay, so that's a part of why I'm making decisions, but it shouldn't be driving my decisions.

And sometimes being able to talk about this openly with your kids, especially as they get older. "I'm afraid that if you say no to everything, you're going to feel kind of left out and bored when you go to try to play with your friends but they're all busy doing other things -- or that they're all together doing something and you're not a part of it. So I kind of feel like maybe we should sign you up for this." Or "I felt like being a part of the band was really a great way to start high school because it was like a built in group of friends, and I think maybe you should give that a try," right? So being honest about why you want that for them, what you think would be good, but not necessarily making the decision based on that.

And then, of course, there's social media, right, and what you hear or think or believe that other people's kids are doing and how well they're doing those things. And of course, we know that what people post is the highlights. Right? It's not everything. And you don't know, like, that kid who's doing great in one area may hate doing it. Right? They might be miserable doing that, feeling like, "this isn't what I wanted." Right? But their parents got a good picture or a good highlight. That a caption for that. However many goals they scored or whatever role they got in something.

That doesn't necessarily reflect your values or your priorities, right. So making sure that you're not trying to put your kid in a position to give you some good content or content that compares to other people, but that you're actually going back to, what are our goals as a family?

## **Slide 11**

So as people pre-submitted some questions, this is one of the questions about how do you help your children narrow down their interests and also help children realize where their strengths are. And I think this is a really good question, and this is a question that a lot of parents ask or that a lot of therapy sessions -- we spend some time thinking about.

Let's pretend you got a kid who wants to sign up for everything. It's just too much. And you can't be in all of these places at once. They don't want to practice. They want to be in everything, but they don't want to do the work in between. They seem to show a lot of potential in swimming, but their friends do soccer. And you know what? Your kid is just not any good at soccer, so you're kind of like, "I really want them to

keep doing swimming because they're actually good at swimming. Even though they want to do soccer. They're really I mean, like, there are a lot of kids who are way better than them.

They barely know what they're doing on the field. They're tripping over themselves." I said, "hey, well, if you want to play soccer, that's fine. Let's go in the backyard, and I'm going to help you with soccer, and I could get you, like, a soccer tutor, whatever, to help you get better at soccer. "But my kid just doesn't care about putting the time in to get better.

Okay, so what is going on here? What do you think is happening? How is the parent making these decisions? What's the parent thinking that the kid wants to get out of this?

(murmurs from audience)

The kid wants to be with their friends. The kid is saying, I want to have fun and I want to be with my friends. But sometimes, and I'm not suggesting that the parent who submitted this question is thinking this, but sometimes when we break this down, like in therapy sessions, how do you help your children narrow down their interests and help them realize where their strengths are? That's a fear, right? That my kids not very good at soccer and I'm worried that they're going to feel like the worst player on the team. I want my kid to do things that they're going to be the best at or that they've got the most potential to be really good at. I want my kid to be at the top of the heap as opposed to the middle or the bottom, right?

That is not this kid's goal. They want to be with their friends. You don't always have to be good at what you do. And as adults, I mean, sometimes that's natural. Sometimes that people enjoy doing things that they're good at or better at. But many times -- I like to play pickleball and I'm not good at pickleball. I like to play -- I don't really like to play golf, but sometimes I do like to play golf, and I use that as an example because I'm not good at golf, but I do it sometimes. And it might be nice to have leisure activities where the goal is not to be good at it or to be the best at it, but it is that you enjoy doing it. You enjoy being outside, you enjoy getting some exercise, you enjoy the people who are doing it. But oftentimes parents assume that their kid is going to feel bad if they're not very good at this.

Kids don't feel bad. Young kids don't feel bad when they're not the best on the team. That does sometimes start to develop, and that is sometimes if their friends are making fun of them or they're feeling embarrassed or whatever because they don't know how to kick a ball or catch a ball or whatever -- that's natural selection.

So your question is, how do you help them narrow down their interests? That's going to take care of itself. If they get older. And this is not really a scene for them because they're embarrassed, they don't feel very competent or capable, they're not going to want to sign up for it again, right?

But sometimes kids start to care about it because they feel like -- they don't realize that it's a problem. But the many suggestions, the helpful encouragement from the parents to practice, get better, improve, improve, improve, starts to tell them, "oh, I'm supposed to do this to try to get on the A team," right? Like

being on a B team isn't the worst thing in the world if you're not like 100% dedicated to this sport and that's not your goal. That's not what you want. You just want to do this activity, right?

So sometimes that narrowing down interest takes care of itself. But I also think that realizing where their strengths are -- that's also for us as parents to think about what are some strengths that we might not see?

Sometimes I think parents are focusing on the very skill-based strength. So like soccer skills, right? But sometimes the strength is being willing to try new things, being willing to put yourself out there, being a good teammate, being -- having a lot of energy, or having the courage to try something new. Sometimes that's a strength that we can help our kids realize -- "oh, you're the person who's willing to -- when we're going to do something and there's like a sign up or volunteer participate, raise your hand to do this. You're the one who's got their hands up because you're not afraid to give it a try." You don't have to be the best in order to try something. Right?

So I think sort of thinking about our questions a little bit differently. So this is a pre-submitted question, but are there questions that some of you have tonight that you want to discuss?

### ***CFK Moderator***

A parent asks, how do I know what is the appropriate amount of activities when most of my child's day is actually spent doing things like therapies? How do I find a balance between doing therapies and fun extracurricular activities?

### ***Meghan Barlow, PhD***

What's the appropriate dosing? Right? So what's the appropriate dosing of all these social activities? You don't want to be overdosing somebody, right? But they're not going to get any more benefit. And sometimes there's a cost because at activities until like eight at night or whatever, thinking about things like sleep, for some people, it's like, you know what, the fresh air, the activity, the doing stuff that's going to help him go to sleep. If on a day that we're home all day and there's nothing he's up until midnight or something, that's an important thing for you to be thinking about. Because not just the exposure to language or being engaged or whatever, but sleep is a huge part of overall behavior, readiness to learn some of those skills. So if you've got a kid who's falling asleep in their speech therapy or whatever, that's not going to be a great speech therapy session because they're asleep, right? Or if they're so overtired, they're super cranky.

So I think that the questions you can ask yourself about how much is too much is like -- what are all these activities getting in the way of? If anything? If you're feeling like you need to cut back a little bit or take a break a little bit, --like some of these activities, is it the sort of thing where you can for yourself or your own sanity, if you're exhausted -- take a break every -- have Wednesdays be your off day or something so you're at home or cut back so that you're home a little bit earlier, certain nights or something. Is there a way to shave a little bit of that off while you're still getting the benefits of he's improving, and progressing, and he's tired, and he's getting sleep at nighttime. You might even just experiment a little bit with shaving

a little off of it and thinking about sort of what makes the most sense to shave off of it, whether it's based on the timing or well, that's a free program. We'll just try to cut that out -- or we want to keep that one and cut out something that we're paying for session by session or something.

But you might experiment a little bit and get some of the providers who know him involved in it. So if you've got speech or behavior therapist or something working with him, you might say, "I want to figure out if we can cut back on some of these things we're doing. Can you help me figure out how to pay attention to if this is causing a problem, if there's no change, or if it's getting better?"