Overview

Read/describe what hyper-parenting is using the background information below. For further preparation read the attached article titled, Hyper-Parenting: The Overscheduled Child, before teaching this lesson.

Background Information:
"Hyper-parenting" is a phrase we use to describe a child-rearing style now prevalent in middle and upper middle class homes. In these families, parents become over-involved in every detail of their children’s academic, athletic, and social lives. They over-enrich their children’s environment and over-schedule them. These parents solve their child’s problems, do their work for them, and involve their child in activities the child doesn’t want to be involved in at all or doesn’t want to be involved in any longer.

This lesson will discuss how over-involvement of children can negatively impact their individual development and relationships with their parents. Strategies will be provided to help parents avoid the hyper-parenting trap and, in addition, provide “escape” strategies for parents who are currently living the hyper-parenting trap.

Activity – Repunzel and Her Overprotective Momma!

If possible play the following YouTube video showing the relationship between the Disney character Repunzel and her mother. It will help to create some initial discussion. You can find the YouTube video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fi8kYcl2Y38

If you do not have internet access, then use the handout titled, Mothers Knows Best Lyrics. Have the participants read (even as part of the video if you can show it) and have them answer the following questions:

1. What are the consequences of Repunzel’s mother “protecting” Repunzel from the outside world?
2. How do you think Repuzel feels?
3. How would you communicate to Repunzel’s mother that she has to let her child “go” without hurting the mother’s feelings?


**Teaching Point #1 – Consequences of Hyper-Parenting A Child**

Hyper-parenting and over-scheduling children is what most of us mothers and fathers do. We sincerely are trying to do what's best for our kids and are willing to do what it takes to give our children the best possible shot at success in life. To get there, we follow the media-recommended path. As hyper-parenting and over-scheduling became the accepted way to raise families, our sense of balance was lost. The following are some negative consequences associated with hyper-parenting.

1. Go over the handout titled, *Hyper-Parenting Behaviors*. Ask participants as a group if they have ever exhibited any of the behaviors and/or what other behaviors could go on this list?
2. Go over handout titled, *The Negative Impact Hyper-Parenting Can Have on Your Child*. Have the participants as a group describe what they think about the negative consequences and/or have they seen these behaviors in their own or other children.

**Teaching Point #2 – 12 Ways To Avoid the Hyper-Parenting Trap**

The first step toward changing your hyper-parenting behavior is to complete a “gut check” and confess to yourself what particular behaviors you truly do exhibit. Then set a goal to begin working on just a few of them at a time. Most importantly, start talking to your kids and consistently communicate to them that they can talk to you ANYTIME WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE OR JUDGEMENT about their feelings as it relates to their involvement in activities and about their relationship with you.

Go over the handout titled, 12 Ways to Avoid The Hyper-Parenting Trap. Ask participants to choose two strategies they plan to use with their child/family. Have participants get into pairs or and complete the following:

Each participant should share with their partner the two strategies they selected.

Then, the pair will work together to write down at least one action step to help that strategy happen. For example, if you chose to make family a priority then what does that look like? So an action step may be to schedule a family outing, go camping (even if it means missing a Saturday soccer game 😊), or just a day where you sit around in your pajamas all day and do activities TOGETHER.

Finally, if time allows, let participants share their strategies/actions steps with the rest of the group.

*END OF LESSON*

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Handouts
and
Background Information
Hyper-Parenting: The Overscheduled Child

We use "hyper-parenting" to describe a style of child-rearing that has - perhaps inadvertently -- become the prescribed way to raise children in middle and upper middle class families. Hyper-Parenting, and its logical consequence - over-scheduled families- have evolved from the belief that within every parent is the power -- and obligation -- to craft the perfect childhood for our kids - one that will guarantee a successful adulthood in the impossibly competitive new e-world.

It is a philosophy built upon the belief that the right possessions and enrichment activities, combined with regular practice, and intense, parental guidance will enable every one of us to raise a perfect kid who will get into Harvard, Yale, Duke, UVa, Stanford, or Princeton (aren't those the places where successful kids go?) and therefore and thereafter, will lead a life of fame and fortune. Children not given these enrichment opportunities will end up hopelessly behind, losers not winners.

As a parenting philosophy and method of child-rearing, hyper-parenting is harming our families. It keeps our kids from becoming self-reliant because it deprives them of the experiences that teach them, eventually, how to be able to make their own way in the world. Hyper-parenting and over-scheduling may also contribute to the large numbers of children being diagnosed as ADD, ADHD, and depressed, and to the many adolescents who give up and get dragged down by drugs, alcohol, and premature sex.

B. History of the Problem:

The social developments and trends that have made hyper-parenting and over-scheduling children so prevalent are complex and hard to tease apart. But it seems that hyper-parenting is connected to profound changes that have taken place in the family in just the past 100 years or so. Over millennia, the family had evolved as a mutually co-operative, often extended, productive unit where every person, whatever their age, contributed to the group's stability and prosperity. Because human labor powered the productive process, children's labor was essential, for instance in picking the eggs or milking the cows.

Starting with the enactment of the Social Security Act and accelerating with our recent unimaginable affluence, many parents can produce enough surplus wealth not to need children's financial support in old age. So instead of being a family's greatest economic asset, children have become its greatest financial liability. Now the question we repeatedly hear is, "Do you know how much it costs to raise a child?"

Today's family life is built on consumption -- not production -- combined with the emotional relationships and the affection that develops between family members. Unfortunately, while families need affection, mutual respect, and compromise so everybody feels they are getting something, hyper-parenting and the intensity that characterizes it insinuate resentment into everyday life, which is not good for anyone.

Three other seemingly unrelated recent, developments have fueled this trend. First, we are the oldest, most educated generation of parents ever. Most of us put off child bearing until our thirties, when we had finished not only college, but often graduate programs as well and had established impressive careers.
When it came to raising our families, we went at it with that same energetic intensity that enabled us to accomplish so many things in our professional lives. But raising children is not like writing a dissertation, or putting together a marketing plan. It requires a different, relatively low tech, skill set.

Second, the media mushroomed. As we became an ever-more consumer-driven society, marketers came up with more and more ways to reach us. Enormous news "holes" were created by Ted Turner's innovative 24-hour news channel, by the explosive growth in magazine-format news programs, by the many new parenting magazines and websites. Today, parenting information bombards us. All of it—much of which is good, helpful, and certainly well intentioned—is written with the voice of authority. But that leads us to question the things that we--ordinary lay people--are doing in our homes. It makes us anxious because experts maintain that if we follow their advice precisely, we will finally parent right. And who among us is always comfortable that we are already doing that?

While magazines say that, of course we ought to let our kids be kids, their stories insinuate the opposite. They tell us that without Baby Einstein our kids will never master math, and on and on. In aggregate they say, hyper-parent or else. So even if we want to resist it, we feel pressured to sign our kid up for one more activity.

Several prior authors identified aspects of hyper-parenting. David Elkind spoke about The Hurried Child in a classic book. Others wrote about the stress that sports place on young girls' bodies, eating habits, and minds, or the errors in the zero to three literature which imply that children need to be endlessly enriched. While much of this work was superb and cautionary, we detected a broader outline to the problem. Americans seemed to be being assaulted with a continuous pressure to plan, enrich, and do this important job, the one, precisely right way. It began before parents conceived, and continued through pregnancy, infancy, early childhood, and all the school years that follow. To us, these were all parts of a single phenomenon, hyper-parenting.

Hyper-Parenting has a new, destructive emphasis. Dr. Spock had said that since anxiety brings out the worst in everyone, the one thing a parenting expert could do was to reduce parental anxiety. That is why he urged parents to trust themselves, beginning his book with, "You know more than you think you do."

Contemporary hyper-parenting advice--in magazines, newspapers, and on television and the radio--carries an entirely different tone of urgency. The message now is "You know so little and if you don't come up to speed quickly by listening to my sage advice, you and your child are very likely to fall hopelessly behind the rest of the parents who are listening and applying this 'hot off the press' information right now, as we speak!!!!!!"

Though it seemed impossible to imagine for those of us who came of age in the flower child years, the 1980's saw society become even more materialistic and market-driven. "Stuff" would solve emotional dilemmas. Child rearing information was part of the trend. It focused parental attention on the products and services you could buy to build a perfect child, as if important aspects of child-rearing were sort of like programming a computer. New improved educational toys, Rolls Royce strollers, and high priced enrichment activities came on the market, and we became convinced that all this stuff would make our lives easier and help us to raise our kids in a better, accelerated fashion.
The third development spurring hyper-parenting involved technological advances in the 1980's and 90's that altered the emotional experience, even the very focus, of pregnancy.

Research shows that in generations past, it wasn't until the last days or weeks before birth that mothers began to think of the fetus as a child. But with the Doppler stethoscope and ultrasounds that every expectant mother now receives as part of routine care, parents-to-be could see their fetuses sucking their thumbs and kicking their tiny little legs. We all began to bond with them immediately. In 2000, we know exactly what is happening at what week in pregnancy.

Mothers used to be indulged with pickles and ice cream whenever they wanted them; today, pregnant women are asked to consider not only whether, like 3 stiff martinis, those foods harm an embryo, but whether they are actually good for the developing fetus! His majesty the fetus became the centerpiece of the pregnancy. Martyrdom became the model for good mothering. It is a cruel change. Rather than treating pregnant women as special, in a vulnerable situation, the ability to bond with fetuses has made embryos central, and has made mothers into simply better or worse vessels for carrying them.

All this new, and very helpful technology also created a conviction that we have enormous control over pregnancy. Today, parents are made to feel responsible for everything. Watch every mouthful of food you eat and ask "Is this good for my baby," advises the best seller in the field What to Expect When You are Expecting, now read by an astonishing 93% of pregnant women. Our book, which urges parents to relax and trust themselves and their own good judgment (and most of us do know when we are using good judgment) is a good antidote.

Because if you read the other books and something goes wrong and the baby is born imperfect, you are led to suspect that it just might be those M & M's you ate. Parents are being made anxious at the very time when they most needed to have their confidence in themselves bolstered.

By the 1990s, parents of infants became accustomed to checking their child's developmental progress off standardized charts to assess their health and well-being - and, as parents are wont to do, compare their performance to others, to predict their success in life. Along with this came a linear view of child development, one unsupported by much reliable evidence. The contention was that if a child did something earlier than peers, he would continue to keep that lead. Thus, the child who learned how to read early would score highest on the verbal SAT in their teens. A child who excelled at a sport in elementary school would stick with it and star later. None of which is, in fact, true.

C. Who Does Hyper-parenting and over-scheduling Affect?

Hyper-parenting and over-scheduling children is what most of us mothers and fathers do. We sincerely are trying to do what's best for our kids and are willing to do what it takes to give our children the best possible shot at success in life. To get there, we follow the media-recommended path. As hyper-parenting and over-scheduling became the accepted way to raise families, our sense of balance was lost.
D. Why It Exists:

Contrary to positions we may have trained for years to get, we come to this crucial job as parents with no experience. Many, if not most, of us are insecure. We worry that we just might not have inside ourselves the love and skills that it takes to raise children right. Some of us resent being hypo-parented, being ignored because our parents made their own personal and social lives so central in the family. Maybe we felt sad to have felt so insignificant to them and promised we would do otherwise with our own children.

In the process of figuring out how to parent well, we are also being saddled with the notion that our child's success -- in public achievements (like getting the lead in the school play or being placed in the top math group) -- is the measure of our success as parents. Since we feel entirely responsible, we want evidence that our efforts are paying off. That is why the most competitive adult sport is no longer golf-it is parenting.

We know that prematurity is bad for infants - yet we applaud it in children! If our three-year-old is ahead of the pack, reciting the alphabet perfectly or riding a two-wheeler, many of us take it as a sign of giftedness. We also take a child's failure to excel at even a simple developmental milestone, like crawling or learning to read at five, as a sign that we have ignored some crucial obligation, have been inadequate, and have not done what's best for our child. It becomes a sign that we need tutors or further enrichment or some solution to the problem (which may not be a problem at all). Otherwise, we are being remiss as parents. We say we want a baby Einstein, but we really would panic if we had one: Although Einstein the adult was a genius, the baby Albert Einstein seemed to be slow learner who talked late and did poorly at school. What we really want is a grown up Einstein guaranteed prenatally.

E. Examples from Everyday Life:

Contemporary parenting advice also dehumanizes our children and us in a subtle way. It urges us to see "enrichment" as software, and our children as computers. But children are human beings, and what matters for the long run are not activities and possessions, but character and relationships. Yet the hyper-parenting advice model teaches us to distrust our instincts and to aim for precise scientific calibration. Supposedly helpful products may actually put distance between our child and ourselves.

The hyper-parenting method, with its inherent belief that we can control what our kids become has gotten us to strange places. Today, we plan to plan to get pregnant. We enrich the fetal environment. Georgia's Governor Zell signed a bill to send every newborn in the state home with a Mozart CD, because he believed the latest "research" that listening to that kind of music enhances mathematical ability.

If that were true, Governor Zell would have been right and forward thinking. But like much that passes for scientific fact today, this research has recently come into question, since the Mozart effect, which has sold literally millions of dollars of dubiously "educational" products, is questionable, at best! That research was done on college students, not babies. And subsequent studies were unable to find any lasting change at all, only a fleeting improvement in the ability to pay attention.
Furthermore, does any data show that Mozart is better than Willie Nelson or, for that matter, The Backstreet Boys?

Another example: We are strong advocates of breast feeding. Yet we recognize that similarly questionable research has gotten some lactation consultants urging mothers to breastfeed - even if they had great difficulty with it or intense, personal discomfort with the idea. Otherwise, they warn, new moms would be depriving their newborns of precisely 8 IQ points. Does it really help any infant to experience an anxious mother who hates the idea of breastfeeding but does it out of a deep moral sense of duty, to God and country? This absolutist viewpoint, which emphasizes an action rather than on its emotional meaning and the relationship between the two participants, has gotten lactation consultants labeled, in a New Yorker article by Wendy Wasserstein, as "nipple Nazis."

Over-scheduling children and hyper-parenting has gotten four year olds, kids too young to understand the rules of the games, let alone master the complex physical challenges of controlling a ball and running down a field, or even which goal they are aiming at, enrolled in competitive leagues.

Today, it makes a weird sort of sense to schedule our kids' piano lessons at 7 o'clock in the morning so we can fit in even more enrichment into our afternoons and evenings.

In education, we act as if children can be either gifted or learning disabled - no one can be average.

It has convinced many adults that a ten-year-old's ice hockey practice, scheduled for 9 p.m. on a Saturday night, should take precedence over, say, a candlelight dinner with our cherished spouse, not once, but every week.

And it has gotten high school students and their parents busy shaping the teen-agers' resumes so they fit what elite colleges are supposed to be looking for.

**EXAMPLE:** A 14-year-old boy was a very good athlete but a so-so student. His therapist asked what it was like to excel at sports, expecting to hear how good it felt. Instead, he said that it was nice in some ways, but he would prefer just playing ball with some of his friends, no adults around. "Why?" he was asked. "I'm judged at school, he replied. "I'm judged when I play for my school and travel team. I just want some place where I'm not judged!"

Kids are constantly rushed from activity to activity. Many of us have outrageously expensive wooden play sets, and now of course, trampolines in our backyards. But do our kids have time to play on them? In hurrying and over-scheduling kids, we are inadvertently communicating that we expect our children to be hyperactive, over-achieving, over-scheduled workaholics. Down time is wasted time. Would you buy into that kind of life or would you, like a senior in a prestigious NYC high school, start to ask why you are doing it and find yourself too depressed to get out of bed? Oh, by the way, he is first in his class and is being recruited for every prestigious college in America.
Since family life no longer leaves children with concrete ways to repay parents' devotion and sacrifice, kids with the ability often try to repay parents with achievement -- good grades, athletic accomplishment, or both. But some can't and feel inadequate and despondent as a result - "In my family, its Harvard, Yale, or nothing. And I just can't measure up!" one boy said.

Others do get to the Ivies and break down in the first year. Because often they are left confused about who they are and what they want, whether they accomplished all this for us or for themselves. For years they ignored the stress and left no time to relax or enjoy themselves. They delay the emotional breakdown until they have the prize they have sought for so long and feel completely lost.

**F. The Harm It Causes:**

Children get a subliminal message from this constant enrichment and rushing. "If I am as good as my parents make a point of telling me I am, how come I need constant self-improvement? I must not be so good after all." So they either try to get away from us -- and bury themselves in Gameboy -- or in the teen-aged years give up and drop out. I think this contributes to teen-aged depression, substance abuse, and sex problems.

The media and its messages celebrate precocity as if it were the goal. Subliminally, they urge children to premature, competitive accomplishment. They stage a big hoopla about the twelve-year-old athletic stars or Internet whiz kid. But in the atmosphere they are creating, they are shocked when a little girl, only seven years old, one who has been followed by a gaggle of their reporters and has been celebrated in magazines everywhere, crashes and burns in the plane she is trying to fly. That was Jessica Dubroff.

For a few days, we act contrite, until the next whiz kid comes along and gets front-page treatment. It is wrong but does not stop.

Let's look at these athletics for a moment. Hobbies are great. Passions are great. But they are supposed to enrich lives, not add pressure. We are enthusiastic believers, big supporters of kids and sports - our own children play numerous sports, some on very competitive levels. But the whole kids sport scene has gotten out of hand. Parents and coaches often take it all too seriously. Really, what does it matter which team of eight-year-old wins a soccer game? The outcome of the game is never the point.

In judging everything our kids do, even everything our infants do, we have lost sight of an essential truth. Children are, by definition, immature and unfinished. Childhood is a preparation, not a full performance. They are not supposed to excel, or even be good, at anything. That's why they are learning. Think about how this pressure looks from a child's vantage point. What can a child gather from being judged on how fast they grow and achieve milestones as infants, to how early they learn to read, to how good they are at tennis or ballet or creative writing. How would you feel if you were scrutinized and graded on every action you took? What reaction might it evoke in you if, say, your spouse did it to you?

We have allowed hobbies and passions to become full time, unpaid jobs. Some coaches tempt parents with the hope that their beloved child might just get a college scholarship if they do well. Perhaps. But only 1% of kids who start do get those scholarships. What of those who do get them? Almost none make the pro's. So their lives will depend on their education.
But some never get that either, because they practice so ceaselessly -- which accounts for *Emerge* magazine's Hall of Shame issues (the 50 schools that graduate the fewest black scholarship athletes -- all graduated 0%). What ought to be fun and relaxing, is a full time, anxiety ridden job. Some Princeton teams, for instance, practice six hours a day, leaving students to choose between an education and sports. And that is Ivy League sports, which are not the college big time. That is why some kids on athletic scholarships who have the means, give them up because they want to become, say, a pediatrician and can not do school work on a six hour a day swimming practice schedule.

Maybe the boy who just wanted not to be judged is intelligent enough to sense an even more destructive idea that lays hidden in the cheers and applause. Take the recent Olympics. They had lots of positives. But the Olympics just taught us and our children subliminally, without ever saying it, that in this society's assessment, being extreme to win is good! There is one, and only one, real winner. Everyone else, except *maybe* numbers two and three, are absolutely nothing, inconsequential, real losers.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently warned parents and doctors about the dangers of kids competing in demanding, incredibly competitive sports. They strongly advised that children play multiple sports and specialize in one only after puberty. But will anyone listen? Should we be concerned that competitive gymnasts - like the ones we just applauded in the Sydney Olympics - are so intensely active that their physical development is significantly delayed, so they get their first menstrual period a year or two later than their non-gymnast schoolmates? Are they short because they are selected for that or because of what the sport does to them? No one knows for sure. Should we be alarmed by the long list of injuries and surgeries the Olympics announcer tells us that each girl has had? It's the price for competing. Should we accept that as a model without question because they "are going for the gold"?

Furthermore, the recent Olympics also have an insidious, unspoken message. They say that life is lived for peak experiences; everything should be sacrificed to attain one. Most of us have peak experiences in our lives, maybe once every decade or two. If life is about the super-highs, everyday ordinariness seems like a life mis-spent. No wonder so many people are seeking cheap, but costly thrills, and find everyday life, and time alone, boring. So use cocaine or climb Everest. That's *really* being alive.

Not only does the "succeed at all costs" mentality diminish the meaning of our everyday lives. It also contradicts other values we supposedly hold dear. If there is only one right way to succeed, where do cooperation, generosity, and kindness fit in? Should we teach our children tooth and nail killer competitiveness?

Emphasizing achievements and accomplishments makes the most important factor - our relationship with our children and the quiet, unplanned time it takes to develop -- less important. What is wealth without relationship? As a very wealthy friend of mine -- on his I don't know what number marriage said -- what you get with money, if you don't have a good relationship, is nothing more than the ability to be miserable in much nicer surroundings.

Is there really only one good psychiatrist in the world, only one great teacher, one great pediatrician, one pilot worth flying with, one successful investment banker, industrialist, ski instructor, or painter? If there is, most of us are in desperate trouble.
But it is a big world with room for lots of people to play important and valuable roles. So why do we push an idea that there is only one real winner and, often, only one right way of winning at life?

No. Each individual needs to, and can in our very affluent country, find his or her personal niche. Yale is great for some students. OSU is far better for someone interested in aeronautics. Sure you ought to have ambitions for your child and the expectation that they will make something of their lives. But if we also give our children the sense that we know who they are and trust that they eventually will find a good place in life for themselves, we maximize the odds of this happening. If we say, though actions and gestures, that we are very nervous about their futures, we may create a self-fulfilling prophecy and diminish the odds that they will do well.

The winning is everything mentality has another flaw. It devalues inner life, creativity, and imagination. Kids need free time, to think, to create an inner life, to hear their inner voice, the one that makes them draw this unique picture or to write this unusual story. They need to just veg out. They need time to grouse with friends, about us. (Tom Sawyer)

G. There is a solution that allows you and them to thrive

Leave unscheduled time. Everyone needs it. Cut back 5-7% in scheduled activities. That's all you need to recapture sanity. Relax and enjoy your child, your life, and your unscheduled time. Be unproductive sometimes. Spend time when you have no real expectations. Play Monopoly, shoot hoops (with no coaching), draw pictures, take a walk, or watch a movie. Maybe you can even smell the roses once in a while. Make character and relationship count. Live your values.

And do things which have no product that has to be produced at the end other than the joy of spending time together. That gives the child a message that you like the kid as he or she is - "No need for clever conversation," as the Billy Joel song goes. "I love you just the way you are." I, your Mom or Dad, love you even when you are not performing. This truly bolsters a child's self-esteem and is the greatest gift we can give our children, the deep, inner conviction that they don't have to perform for us to love and cherish them. Once upon a time, that was called "unconditional love."

We developed some fundamental principles to help you make decisions about what might work best for your family. I will simply list them and will expand on any that interest you. The entire list, with full explanations, can be found on hyper-parenting.com. It is free. Please download it and send it to friends.

It is O.K. To Limit Activities. Think long and hard before signing up for new activities. Some families make firm rules (such as, one sport per child per season) while others make decisions on a case-by-case basis. But if you say yes to too many enrichment opportunities, the whole family will pay the price. Weigh the benefits of participation against the cost - time, energy, logistical effort, stress, and expense - to you, your child, and the rest of the family.

Develop Healthy Skepticism about the parenting advice you pay attention to. Experts should help alleviate stress, not add unnecessary anxiety to an already overloaded life. It makes sense to follow time-tested advice on how to childproof your home; it makes less sense to alter your family's diet dramatically in response to the latest study that promises some purported benefit, but will likely, in the near future, be contradicted and replaced by other findings.
There are trends and styles in science, health, nutrition and education, just as there are fads in fashion and home design. One year we are encouraged to limit fat in a child's diet, the next we are warned that doing so may be harmful; two years later, studies come out announcing that, in fact, it is okay to restrict fat intake in small children, then we read that chocolate may be a health food. Who knows the truth? In most cases, moderation and good judgment are the best standards.

**Give Yourself a Break.** Your family life is meant to be your own creation, an ever-changing dance between you, your children, your spouse, your family and friends, and the community at large. Do it your way. You only get one chance. The next time you experience it, you will be watching your children being parents. So embrace the uncertainty, enjoy the new dance steps, and know that because you want to do well, you will feel awkward at times.

**Your Family is a Priority: Relationships matter, maybe more than anything else does.** Our children are with us for a short time before they head out into their own lives, busy with friends, college, jobs and eventually their own families. We ought to enjoy them, and the brief flicker of time we have with them. Family life should not be overloaded with chores and commitments that add unnecessary resentment to daily life. Family time should be as important as education, athletics, social activities and other outside commitments. If your family is too busy to hang out together, if you and your spouse hardly ever spend time alone together as a couple, adjustments need to be made.

**The Buyer Must Beware.** We live in a market-driven society, where just about everyone is selling something, directly or indirectly. Go into the world with that awareness, and ask yourself whether a particular product or service will enrich your life - or merely distract you, appease your child, or add further complications. Despite how hard advertisers work to persuade you that life will be smoother, happier, and far closer to perfection if you buy just this one additional item, do not spend your hard earned money on unnecessary products.

**Character Counts.** A lot! Know that how you live your life in front of your child matters more than how you tell him he ought to be living his. Character lasts a lifetime. Live the values that are important to you, because your children will emulate your daily conduct when they grow up and go out into the world.

**It Is Good At Times To be Unproductive.** A life that consists of endless activities demonstrates to our children that we expect them to be hyperactive workaholics who run from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. with no rest. It tells them they need to work hard at polishing and perfecting themselves, and says implicitly that we don't believe they are "good enough" as they are. It is good for families to spend unproductive time together - shooting hoops, taking walks, playing games, sitting and talking, reading. The fact that you, the parent, enjoy spending time with your child with no apparent goal lets her know you find her more interesting than just about anything else in the world - nothing that will bolster her self-esteem more effectively.

**Childhood is a Preparation, Not a Performance.** No one ought to be on stage all the time, not adults and certainly not children! Kids should not be judged on every aspect of their performance in life - it puts too much pressure on them and on us. By definition, children are immature and should not be expected to perform to adult standards. Resist the pressure from coaches, and the media, that tells you how to push your child to excel early.
Pleasure Has A Place in Parents' Lives. Our brief time on earth is meant to be enjoyed, at least sometimes. Our closest relationships should be a source of pleasure, not constant pressure and tension. If we aren't having much fun with our children, spouses, friends - and even ourselves - we need to consider making some changes in our lives. Make time for a romantic dinner with your partner; every child we have ever known has done better if he knows his parents are happy and are getting pleasure from life and their relationships.

Pleasure Has A Place In Kids' Lives Too! Childhood needn't be an endless treadmill of productivity and self-improvement. Kids deserve to have fun, down time, and empty spaces in their lives to fill any way they choose to. Many supposedly "fun" scheduled activities are anything but fun; they are tense, pressured times when a child is expected to perform. Remember, if your child enjoys his time with you now, it will stay with him forever. And emotionally at least, the relationship that has meant so much to him as a child will stay with him and bolster him as an adult.

Leave Empty Spaces on Your Calendar. Parents worry about kids' boredom, so they schedule their lives to keep them busy. But empty hours teach children how to create their own happiness - and that is an important skill we would all benefit from developing. Unscheduled time encourages children to create, imagine, see new possibilities that no one before has thought of, certainly no one designing scheduled or pre-packaged play. It teaches children to fill their own empty time enjoyably.

Trust Yourself. Don't believe the experts who tell you they know how you ought to raise your child. When it comes to your family, you are the expert. You are the best parent your child could ever have. In the words of the good Dr. Benjamin Spock, who said it first and said it best, "Trust Yourself. You know more than you think you do."

H. Conclusion:

There Is No Single, Right Way To Parent. Every family is unique and must find its own way in the world - its own values and priorities, its own strengths, its own interests. So disregard the experts who believe they have the one right answer. With some caveats, we should all feel free to raise our children our own way - but in order to figure out what that way is, each of us needs to invest some time and energy into learning what our lives are about, what we believe in, and what we value. Rush a little less; reflect a little more.

Hyper-parenting and over-scheduling take our focus off what is crucial. We have so much to be pleased about. We live in affluent times, wake up in safe neighborhoods, have a good educational system, have food, shelter, and an opportunity for meaningful relationships and lives. Maybe we ought to start appreciating our and our children's enormous good fortune.
You want to go outside? Why, Rapunzel
    Look at you, as fragile as a flower
    Still a little sapling, just a sprout
You know why we stay up in this tower
    That's right, to keep you safe and sound, dear

Guess I always knew this day was coming
    Knew that soon you'd want to leave the nest
    Soon, but not yet
    Trust me, pet
    Mother knows best

Mother knows best
    Listen to your mother
    It's a scary world out there
    Mother knows best
    One way or another
    Something will go wrong, I swear

Ruffians, thugs, poison ivy, quicksand
    Cannibals and snakes, the plague
Also large bugs, men with pointy teeth and
    Stop, no more, you'll just upset me

Mother's right here
    Mother will protect you
Darling, here's what I suggest
    Skip the drama
    Stat with mama
    Mother knows best

Go ahead, get trampled by a rhino
    Go ahead, get mugged and left for dead
Me, I'm just your mother, what do I know?
    I only bathed and changed and nursed you
    Go ahead and leave me, I deserve it
    Let me die alone here, be my guest
When it's too late, you'll see - just wait
    Mother knows best
Mother knows best
Take it from your mumsy
On your own, you won't survive
Sloppy, underdressed
Immature, clumsy - please!
They'll eat you up alive
Gullible, naive
Positively grubby
Ditzy and a bit, well, hmm...vague
Plus, I believe
Gettin' kinda chubby
I'm just saying cause I wuv you

Mother understands
Mother's here to help you
All I have is one request

Don't forget it
You'll regret it
Mother knows best
Hyper-Parenting Behaviors

- You do not let your child take enough risks
- You are afraid to let them play outside
- You do not let them date for fear they may break-up and be emotionally hurt
- You step in too soon and solve their problems for them
- You assist your child in avoiding “life lessons” like bringing homework to school when left at home, encouraging teachers to let your child re-take a test that he failed or buying a new IPHONE for your child that he didn’t take proper care of
- You don’t allow your child to feel what it’s like when they don’t get what they want
- You do homework and projects for them (specifically in middle or high school)
- You give-in to avoid seeing your child get upset
- You involve your child in a sport or activity because YOU want them involved in it rather than the child wanting to be involved
- You don’t let them fail!
The Negative Impact Hyper-Parenting Can Have on Your Child

- Can lead to fears and low self-esteem
- Sets children up for failure
- Doesn’t show them how the real world works
- Don’t learn that success is dependent upon actions/behaviors
- Increased prescriptions for anxiety/depression medications
- Increased pain pill consumption
- Decreased sense of well-being
- Decrease in grades because over-focus on sports (and parents are not willing to take their child out of the sport)
- Less that positive relationship between parent and child due to over-pressure from parents to succeed
- Rebellious behavior by child especially in the college years
- Child regret in later years...wishing they would have had the courage to tell their parents they didn’t want to play certain sports, certain activities to just tell their parents to “back off”
- Can’t problem solve well
**How To Avoid the Hyper-Parenting Trap**

Here are some fundamental principles to help you make decisions about what might work best for your family.

**Limit Activities.** Think long and hard before signing up for new activities. Some families make firm rules (such as, one sport per child per season) while others make decisions on a case-by-case basis. But if you say yes to too many enrichment opportunities, the whole family will pay the price. Weigh the benefits of participation against the cost - time, energy, logistical effort, stress, and expense - to you, your child, and the rest of the family.

**Develop Healthy Skepticism.** Be discriminating about the advice you pay attention to. Experts should help alleviate stress, not add unnecessary anxiety to an already overloaded life. It makes sense to follow time-tested advice on how to childproof your home, say; it makes less sense to alter your family's diet dramatically in response to the latest study that promises some purported benefit, but will likely be contradicted and replaced by other findings in the near future. There are trends and styles in science, health, nutrition and education, just as there are fads in fashion and home design. One year we are encouraged to limit fat in a child's diet, the next we are warned that doing so may be harmful; two years later, studies come out announcing that, in fact, it is okay to restrict fat intake in small children. Who knows the truth? In most cases, moderation and good judgment are the best standards.

**Give Yourself a Break.** Your family life is meant to be your own creation, an ever-changing dance between you, your children, your spouse, your family and friends, and the community at large. Do it your way. You only get one chance. The next time you experience it, you will be watching your children being parents. So embrace the uncertainty, enjoy the new dance steps, and know that because you are trying hard, because you are an individual, and this has never been done quite this way before, you will feel awkward at times. That's the human condition - it's normal, and it is fine.

**Family is a Priority.** Relationships matter, maybe more than anything else. Our children are with us for a short time before they head out into their own lives, busy with friends, college, jobs and eventually their own families. We ought to enjoy them, and the brief flicker of time we have with them. Family life should not be overloaded with chores and commitments that add unnecessary resentment to daily life. If your family is too busy to hang out together, if you and your spouse hardly ever spend time alone together as a couple, adjustments need to be made. Family time should be as important as education, athletics, social activities and other outside commitments.

**Buyer Beware.** We live in a market-driven society, where just about everyone is selling something, directly or indirectly. Go into the world with that awareness, and ask yourself whether a particular product or service will enrich your life - or merely distract you, appease your child, or add further complications. Do not spend your hard earned money on unnecessary products - despite how hard advertisers work to persuade you that life will be smoother, happier, and far closer to perfection if you buy just this one additional item.
**Character Counts.** A lot! Know that how you live your life in front of your child matters more than how you tell him he ought to be living his. Character lasts a lifetime. Live the values that are important to you, because your children will emulate your daily conduct when they grow up and go out into the world.

**Be Unproductive.** A life that consists of endless activities demonstrates to our children that we expect them to be hyper-active workaholics who run from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. with no rest. It tells them they need to work hard at polishing and perfecting themselves, and says implicitly that we don't believe they are "good enough" as they are. It is good for families to spend unproductive time together - shooting hoops, taking walks, playing games, sitting and talking, reading. The fact that you, the parent, enjoy spending time with your child with no apparent goal lets her know you find her more interesting than just about anything else in the world - nothing that will bolster her self-esteem more effectively.

**Childhood is a Preparation, Not a Performance.** No one ought to be on stage all the time, not adults and certainly not children! Kids should not be judged on every aspect of their performance in life - it puts too much pressure on them, and too much pressure on us. By definition, children are immature and should not be expected to perform to adult standards. Resist the pressure from coaches, and the media, that tells you how to push your child to excel early.

**Pleasure Has A Place In Parents' Lives.** Our brief time on earth is meant to be enjoyed, at least sometimes. Our closest relationships should be a source of pleasure, not constant pressure and tension. If we aren't having much fun with our children, spouses, friends - and even ourselves - we need to consider making some changes in our lives. Make time for a romantic dinner with your partner; every child we have ever known has done better if he knows his parents are happy, and are getting pleasure from life and their relationships.

**Pleasure Has A Place In Kids' Lives Too!** Childhood needn't be an endless treadmill of productivity and self-improvement. Kids deserve to have fun, down time, and empty spaces in their lives to fill any way they choose to. Many supposedly "fun" scheduled activities are anything but fun; they are tense, pressured times when a child is expected to perform. Remember, if your child enjoys his time with you now, it will stay with him forever. And emotionally at least, the relationship that has meant so much to him as a child will stay with him and bolster him as an adult.

**Leave Empty Spaces On Your Calendar.** Parents worry about kids' boredom, so they schedule their lives to keep them busy. But empty hours teach children how to create their own happiness - and that is an important skill we would all benefit from developing. Unscheduled time encourages children to create, imagine, see new possibilities that no one before has thought of, certainly no one designing scheduled or pre-packaged play. It teaches children to fill their own empty time enjoyably.

**There Is No Single, Right Way To Parent.** Every family is unique and must find its own way in the world - its own values and priorities, its own strengths, its own interests. So disregard the experts who believe they have the one right answer. With some caveats, we should all feel free to raise our children our own way - but in order to figure out what that is, each of us needs to invest some time and energy into learning what our lives are about, what we believe in, and what we value. Rush a little less; reflect a little more.
Trust Yourself. Don't believe the experts who tell you they know how you ought to raise your child. When it comes to your family, you are the expert. You are the best parent your child could ever have. In the words of the good Dr. Benjamin Spock, who said it first and said it best, "Trust Yourself. You know more than you think you do."

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Hyper-Parenting: The Overscheduled Child

Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld