

Choosing an After-School Activity for Your Child

(I thought this article might be helpful to some GWA parents, so I've decided to share. I have four children of my own and they are amazing, but they are individuals finding their own way and I learn to respect this everyday! If you have any questions or concerns about GWA's After School Activities program, please do not hesitate to contact me erachad@gwa.ac.ma) Emmy Rachad As a caring parent you want the best for your child. But picking and choosing activities that will be fun and constructive can be overwhelming. There are so many choices, from music lessons and sports, to hobbies and clubs, all of which run the gamut of competitiveness, expense, and time commitment. Then there's the question of letting your child pick their own activities versus you picking the activities you think are best. So, where do you start? There are some things to keep in mind. If your child is attending a full day of school, do not overbook their schedule. Make sure they have enough time to do homework and get enough sleep, which is paramount for healthy development. Encourage your child to choose an activity they think will be fun. Childhood is the best time for exploring interests, support this! **What Type of Activity is Best for Your Child?**

- The best activity for your child is one that interests them.
- If your child is old enough to express interest in a particular activity, listen to them!
- Present your child with several choices and allow them to choose (assuming they are old enough to have a preference).
- If your pediatrician, or your child's teacher, has suggested participation in a certain activity for a specific reason (such as more exercise or help with homework) but your child has zero interest in it, more than a little encouragement may be needed.

Try these tactics:

- Sign up for a new activity with a friend
- Allow your child to choose their own activity as a reward for completing an activity of your choice.
- Consider more than one activity, if your schedule allows. GWA's ASA program offers many choices.
- Consider how you want your child to participate in the activity. Are they just learning (recreational) or do they want to be on a competitive/performance team?
- Consider any travel involved. Are you going to need to pick your child up from school and drive 45 minutes to an activity? There's nothing wrong with travelling to an activity, but keep the driving time and costs incurred (and snacks needed in the car) in mind. GWA's ASA program is a great solution to this concern!

What Are Your Child's Strengths and Weaknesses? Every child has different strengths and weaknesses. Extracurricular activities are a great way to address your child's skill set and

minimize any weaknesses in a friendly, relaxed environment. Here is a breakdown of types of activities and how they can help add to your child's positive development: *Team sports/activities (for example: soccer, basketball and choir) can help with:*

- Attention/ focus
- Physical fitness/stamina
- Gross motor skills (running, jumping, kicking, balance, coordination)
- Social skills (team work, sportsmanship, communication, leadership)
- Behavior (discipline, anger management, assertiveness/shyness, impulse control)

Individual sports (for example: gymnastics and track) can help with:

- Attention/focus
- Physical fitness/ stamina
- Gross motor skills
- Social skills (in both competitive and recreational individual sports)
- Behavior
- Self-esteem/awareness (for children who have low self- esteem, it is best to begin with non-competitive sports)

Individual/club activities (for example: chess, drama, and crafts) can help with:

- Social skills
- Behavioral skills
- Self-esteem/ awareness
- Cognitive skills (learning, broadening education)
- Attention
- Fine motor skills (dexterity, ability to do detail work)

All in all, activities should engage your child in a positive way, whether they are trying a sport, a club, or a class meant to help them develop skills. If they can discover a passion in the process, then you've struck gold. Keep your expectations realistic and age-appropriate remember that you may need to try a few different types of activities before you find one that really works for your child (and for you). *How to choose the right extracurricular activity for your child.*

Shoshana Dayanim, PhD, Contributor