

Keep Your Teen Involved in Extra-Curricular Activities

by Sue Blaney

Do you find yourself wondering if your teenager's extra-curricular activities are really important? At times picking your teenager up from baseball practice, or attending his track meet, concert or play can be difficult for busy or stressed parents. While these activities may look frivolous or unnecessary, they are truly vital to your teenager's healthy development. Grades are important, but they aren't everything. Here is what your teen can gain from participating in extra-curricular activities:

- **Confidence** - When kids develop new skills they build important character traits while increasing their confidence and self-esteem. It can be in any area of interest; sports, music or clubs. Developing skills outside of school is *especially* important for kids who are not doing well academically. All kids need to feel they are good at something.
- **New friends** - Many times teenagers welcome the opportunity to spend time with a different group of kids. They get to try on a new role and be different than they are in school.
- **New skills** - Outside-of-the-classroom activities give kids the opportunity to develop interests and skills that may develop into their life's work, or provide a source of pleasure throughout their life. Maybe your singer will grow up to be a musician, band leader or sing in the church choir for years to come.
- **Structuring time** - Kids can benefit when they are forced to carefully plan their time. School counselors will tell parents that many student athletes do better in school during their busy sports season. Learning good time management is a lesson for life.
- **Brain development** - Researchers call it the "use it or lose it" principle: kids have to use certain parts of their brain to develop it. Because teens' brains are still developing this is a very important time in their life to be exposed to new opportunities to learn.
- **Keep them busy** - The majority of high risk behavior occurs between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays. Participating in healthy after school activities keeps kids from being distracted or bored – and you'll know where your teenager is.

Extra-curricular activities benefit your teenager in ways that aren't always obvious. Support and encourage your teen's participation in out-of-school or after-school activities.