

INSIGHTS

Make time for down-time



If your teenage children live wound-up, highly scheduled lives then they need to rediscover the lost art of down-town.

Down-time is like mucking around except that it's passive. It's about kids relaxing, doing whatever it is they feel like doing – whether that's watching a screen, hanging around with siblings or mates, reading a book or simply daydreaming.

There are three compelling reasons to allow kids down-time:

1. It's great for mental health. Hard-driven kids need some time to rest their brains. The thinking wheels can't keep spinning all the time.
2. It builds relationships. You've got to be close to someone to feel comfortable down-time with them. A household needs to be relaxed and free from tension for down-time to happen.
3. It feels good, which is good reason to do something.

The art of down-time comes with age

Toddlers are too active for down-time. Their physiology ensures that when they have some free time they'll generally keep moving and exploring.

Kids in primary school start to learn the value of down-time. They generally spend down-time on their own or by mucking around with their friends.

Teenagers are natural down-timers. They do it without trying. Teens take up a lot of space during down-time at home, tending to sprawl out and fill living rooms. Many don't mind down-time with their parents if their friends don't see them.

Many parents feel uncomfortable when their kids spend too long in down-time. Busyness is seen as a virtue. Sure, it's good for our kids to be occupied a lot of the time, but active lives need to be balanced with opportunities for inactivity.

Don't confuse down-time with brooding

Brooding, like ruminating, involves a young person repeatedly revisiting their thoughts, going over past mistakes, or worrying about the future. Down-time is different as it enables a young person to chill out and relax. It's free-range mindfulness, or unstructured meditation.

Down-time is a lifetime mental health, relationship-building, and happiness habit. It's something to be encouraged, rather than clamped down.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.