



From the Desk of Your SUSD School Psychologist

Summer Downtime – Pros and Cons

For most teens, balancing school, homework, sports, extracurricular clubs, and part-time jobs, can leave very little downtime during the school year. It seems like summer should be the perfect time to slow down, relax, and take some time off.

Many teens feel pressured to make their summers productive and worry that they will not have enough “resume worthy” activities to put on their college applications. Robin Mamlet, co-author of the book, *College Admission: From Application to Acceptance*, says, “There is nothing wrong with downtime. After the rigor of the school year, kids are entitled to some time that is simply whiled away.” Mamlet continues, “Parents should not make their teen feel ‘less than’ for taking some downtime over the summer.” Mamlet adds, “Colleges aren't looking for the ‘busiest’ students - they're looking for passion and commitment to a larger world. That can come in lots of forms and is not demonstrated, necessarily, by having a plan for every week of the summer.”

Nicole Wise, co-author of the book, *Hyper-Parenting: Are You Hurting Your Child by Trying Too Hard*, says, “Downtime is for dreaming – What do you want to do with your life? How do you feel about issues and people and the behavior of friends? What can you learn from something you said or did yesterday that turned out badly? Teens need to take time to just think and reflect.”

Wise continues, “There’s so much emphasis on resume-building and it’s not all bad. It becomes a problem when activities – like community work or sports – are done only for the wrong reasons. A kid who volunteers at an animal shelter because she likes dogs and needs to build up her resume is being proactive; a kid who signs up for clubs and doesn’t attend meetings or passes out cupcakes at a senior center and then makes fun of the old people but puffs up the experience on his resume is doing it for the ‘wrong’ reasons.”

The challenge is for teens to find meaning in what they choose to do. Denise Clark Pope, co-founder of *Challenge Success*, explains, “There is not one specific thing that colleges are looking for in applicants. A public service trip to Africa is great, but it is no greater than helping an elderly neighbor with chores or babysitting for a local family that cannot afford a sitter. It is about being authentic.”

Teens will benefit from freedom to choose the activities they are involved in during the summer months, as many have interests that they have little time to pursue during the school year. Wise remarks, “Unscheduled time is when you play and try new things. A teen might pick up a book or magazine and read something intriguing or provocative.” And possibly, that “intriguing or provocative” message may change their life focus.

