

Daily Union Article
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Title: Balancing School and Family Time

The phrase “Stop, Drop, and Roll” is taught to our children from a young age. The process is designed to help them remember what to do in case of a fire or in case the clothing they are wearing catches fire. It is a phrase to recall for self-preservation in case of an emergency.

In my home, this phrase has a dual meaning. Sometimes it seems that my family is in constant “Stop, Drop, and Roll” mode. We stop at the house long enough to drop what we brought home from the last event then we have to roll again to the next activity.

With the start of school, I have to remind myself that it is important to slow down, take time for quality family time, and choose carefully what events we will roll into. I know this phrase isn’t as easy to rehearse in my mind, but it is important to follow. Reclaiming family time can strengthen my family unit and add value to our daily living.

The key is in making intentional choices about what activities to participate in. Just as we adults have to balance our work and home life, we need to help our family as a unit find a reasonable balance, as well. If parents and children are overcommitted to a seemingly endless list of activities, the family – and each of its members – will suffer from the stress.

When we run our family rugged, exhaustion is a predictable product. Exhaustion isn’t conducive to learning. It also lends itself to short tempers and quick tongues – from all family members! If you find that your family is experiencing the “Stop, Drop, and Roll” lifestyle I mentioned previously, here are some tips to help you reclaim family time and balance school, family, work and community:

- ✓ Declare (at least) one night a week as family night. Spend time together making a meal, playing games, working on a home project, taking a walk, or going for a bike ride. The point is that you claim this time for your family and protect it from other demands. Relax, and be flexible.
- ✓ Encourage your kids to bring their friends to your house, perhaps joining in the family activities. This has a dual effect. Your child will be happy to have a friend join the fun, and you have the opportunity to get to know your child’s friend.
- ✓ Share family responsibilities. Teach your children how to sort clothes and do their own laundry. Work with them in the kitchen to make their own snacks or participate in meal preparation. Our cooler afternoons and evenings lend themselves to doing yard work. Include the family in these time of home responsibilities. Don’t expect perfection. Instead, accept these types of activities as valuable family time that promotes team work. Learning to work together as a team is a life lesson that will reap many benefits in their future.

- ✓ Take your child(rens) age and interests into consideration. Rather than always focusing on what you like or need to do, ask your child what they want to do. Focus on the benefits of spending time with your children rather than what you perceive you are sacrificing by making time for your family.
- ✓ When considering an after-school or extracurricular activity, take a close look at the time commitment for your child and others in the family. Is transportation available? How many practices will be scheduled each week? Will they be after school? In the evenings? On weekends?
- ✓ Consider the total cost of an activity. Is it possible to rent a band instrument? Buy used, rather than new? What do basketball shoes cost? How much will it cost to travel to and from practices or home and away games?
- ✓ Designate a family calendar and post it in a place where entries can be made easily and schedules checked regularly.
- ✓ Enter school schedules, such as professional development or in-service days, when your children will not be in school for the entire year. You can access the academic calendar for your school district on their website. Writing these dates in will help you to avoid double-booking or a last-minute scramble to schedule childcare.
- ✓ Practice downtime. For many of us, our lives run so fast that sometimes it is difficult to embrace family time in a relaxed manner. If you find yourself to be in this situation, you have likely been running too fast for too long. You will have to retrain your brain and body to relax and embrace the opportunity to enjoy your family time.
- ✓ Make changes as needed. Recognizing when things aren't working is an important step in making the changes, as needed, to balance family life, school and community activities and reduce stress.

Although the Stop, Drop, and Roll is a great mantra for fire safety, it doesn't work nearly as well for a family's schedule. Slowing down, relaxing, and prioritizing family time is a much better way to make your family unit stronger. For more information on family life and balance, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!