

Extracurricular Activities a Good Experience for Youth Lauren Healey, 4-H Youth Development Agent

Have you been debating about whether or not to allow your children to participate in extracurricular activities? Well maybe you should! Researchers have found that extracurricular activities can be a very important source of positive influence in the lives of youth.

Extracurricular activities fulfill 2 basic conditions: 1) They are not part of the regular school program and 2) they include structured activities in addition to socializing. Some examples are church youth groups, school band and of course the 4-H club.

Some of the benefits that have been associated with extracurricular activities are better grades, higher test scores, better school attendance, and higher self concepts. In addition, youth who participate in outside activities learn important skills such as teamwork and leadership skills; skills that help them in all aspects of their life. Also, just spending time participating in extracurricular activities decreases the opportunities for youth to engage in problem behaviors.

When choosing an extracurricular activity, it is important to consider your child's needs and what will work with your family's current schedule. Consider these tips from Kansas State University Research and Extension when deciding which activities to participate in:

Talk with your child. Listen – and observe. See where a child's interests lie before comparing the extent of the commitment with the time available and resources needed.

Look at the big picture. Being on a soccer team will include afterschool practices, family time at games, travel to away games, and weekend time. A 30-minute music lesson once a week is another example. Practice requires a time commitment plus renting and insuring an instrument and cost of the lessons requires a financial commitment. In addition, scheduling transportation to and from an afterschool lesson can be difficult when both parents work.

List the pros and cons for different activities, and then ask questions that will help a child evaluate opportunities, rather than deciding for them.

Volunteer at school or community events as a family. While giving back is a way in which to share personal talents and energy, doing so as a family allows children to see their parents and siblings in leadership roles working to help others.

Finally when choosing an extracurricular activity, it is important that they are fun and attractive for the youth involved – often, the best judges of this are the youth themselves.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.