Don’t Commit to Too Much

I overheard a conversation in a local store regarding school activities. There were definitely different viewpoints shared between a mom and her son regarding the son joining another activity at school. I’m sure this conversation takes place among many families this time of year.

There’s a natural tendency for parents to want to provide opportunities for children, yet at the same time, protect time for the family as a unit. Families need to step back and think about their priorities before evaluating school and community activities.

Be realistic and willing to ask the tough questions. If both parents work and children are in after-school or day care programs, picking up the children, settling back into the home after a day away and getting a meal on the table may be all a family can reasonably manage. Skipping some after-school or evening activities to bring the family together matters.

This doesn’t mean families should avoid all school and community activities. Families need to choose a mix of school, community and volunteer activities that will work within a realistic schedule.

Parents need to involve the children in this selection process.

* Talk with your child. Listen and observe. See where the 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 sports team will include afterschool practices, family time at games, travel to away games and possible weekend time. A 30-minute music lesson once a week is another example. Practice requires a time commitment, plus renting or buying 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.

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

* Consider peer pressure for what it is, and decide accordingly. Don’t be pressured to participate.

* Schedule family time just like you schedule any other activities.

* Volunteer at school or community events as a family. Giving back is a way in which to share personal talents and energy. It also allows children to see their parents and siblings in leadership roles working to help others. Working together also can lay a foundation for community involvement and service that will benefit both the child and the community in the future.

For more information on this topic, contact Eunice Sahr, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent. She can be contacted at the Stutsman County Extension Office, 252-9030, or at eunice.sahr@ndsu.edu.