

5 Tips to a Better Balance Between School and Sports

By Michelle Wells, Contributing Writer

What would the proverbial “fly on the wall” see if it spent a week in your home during a season of school and sports?

Think about it.

Would it see chaos and stress? Or would it see a family working together efficiently?

Families that invest their time and energy in sports are probably already convinced of the value that kids receive from sports participation. However, the challenges of juggling several full schedules are still overwhelming at best and can exact a hefty toll on the family dynamics.

Achieving a balance between family priorities, academic responsibilities, and athletic pursuits does not happen by accident. It has to be intentional and, as a parent, you establish the tone in your home.

Here are 5 tips that can help you set your family up for success in the balancing act between school and sports. An easy way to remember them is to use the acronym G.R.A.C.E. Incidentally, you might need a bit of that too.

1) G is for Game Plan

When a child participates in a sport, everyone in the home is affected. Getting to and from practices and going to games near and far will impact the day-to-day rhythms of a family. For this reason, there needs to be an overall family game plan.

Here are three important elements to include:

- A well thought out list of family priorities
- A large, centrally located family calendar
- An understanding of chore responsibilities

Choose 4 or 5 top family priorities that will guide decision making. These might include things like academics, family outings, church attendance, etc.

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Keep an up-to-date calendar with all of the game dates, upcoming tests, doctor/dentist appointments, etc. to avoid last minute logistical issues.

Clarifying expectations of who is responsible for taking out Rover or emptying the trash helps to avoid unnecessary squabbles.

2) R is for Recognize and Reward

Pushing through to finish that math homework after a challenging practice requires a bit of “mental gymnastics.” As adults, we more than likely have learned the concept of “digging deep,” to find the strength and drive to finish something we may not **feel** like doing. For most kids, it is not something that comes naturally but needs to be learned and then encouraged.

Children love rewards and thrive in environments where they are recognized for hard work. Here are some practical ways you can teach your child to approach all of their responsibilities well.

- Be generous and specific with your affirming words. For example, “John, I am so proud of how positive you were all the way through those intervals at practice.”
- Celebrate small improvements as often as the big accomplishments. Perhaps plan on an ice cream treat after a smooth week of homework, chores, and good attitudes.
- Recognize and randomly reward the **effort** that goes into something – not just the results. Take your child out for an impromptu movie night after a particularly hard day at school and/or practice.

3) A is for Allow

Allow your kids to manage some aspects of their busy schedule. Regardless of mistakes that could be made, they should have some “skin in the game.” In the short term, it helps you as the parent to not be responsible for **everything**. In the long term, it empowers them to practice the art of balancing their daily duties and learn from their mistakes.

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What does this look like? That will depend on the ages of your kids but here are some practical examples:

- Younger children can help pack their sports bags/equipment the night before. You can also enlist their help with putting together lunches and/or healthy snacks.
- Older children should also keep a personal calendar with their school deadlines, game times/locations, and important events. They should be responsible for filling in the family calendar with the events that directly affect them.
- Allow them to make choices on how to divide their time appropriately. Step in only if you see a **pattern** of poor choices.

4) C is for Communication

Packed schedules and full to-do lists can lead to a “putting-out-fires” mode of parenting. Regular and clear communication of expectations is one way to combat this.

A weekly family meeting may seem like a lot of effort, but the dividends far outweigh the costs. Be sure to include these activities:

- Plan out the following week, with calendars in hand. It will protect you from unexpected conflicts.
- Address any bad habits or negative attitudes that may have crept in.
- Plan something fun and upbeat – such as a game, special dessert, or movie and popcorn night.

5) E is for Equip

Set your kids up for smooth sailing by equipping them with the right tools. Most families have this on their radar in the fall but it’s important to realize that school supplies and sports equipment may need replacing throughout the year.

In addition to things that teachers and coaches request, here are other options to equip your child for success:

- Organizational binders, journals, and calendars
- Sports bags that allow them to easily carry everything they need for practices and games
- One-on-one coaching sessions if they are struggling with a skill
- Tutoring or online resources for academic challenges

Final Thoughts

Finding the balance between school and sports requires an intentional effort. Use these five tips – **G**ame plan, **R**ecognize and reward, **A**llow, **C**ommunication, **E**quip – to make it the norm in your home.

Michelle Wells is a wife to one and a mom to six, with 20 plus years of experience at both. With a love for being active in sports she took her passion for competitive training to the world of triathlons where she rocked the elite age group level for several years. In an effort to share her enthusiasm for a balanced and healthy life she inspires others through personal training and freelance writing, especially for Growing Champions for Life <http://mwellssolutions.com/>