

Organized activities don't have to mean sports

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

Football, baseball, softball, soccer — team sports are all over the field. Some parents seem consumed with their kids playing organized team sports, dreaming that their child could become the next super athlete, making millions as a professional. The fact is, only one to three percent of young athletes turn professional. That's a very small percentage, and likely unattainable for the average child. Dreaming is beneficial as long as it is realistic.

The reality is that some children simply are not interested in participating in organized sports ... and that's okay. Does this mean they will be inactive, lack teamwork, and be antisocial? Hardly! There are lots of other opportunities that facilitate teamwork and provide physical activity. The important thing is helping children discover their passion and have fun, especially during the summer months when they are prone to boredom.

If your child is musically inclined, the marching band may be their "sport," or the drill team. It takes coordination, stamina and teamwork to march while playing an instrument or twirling a flag, along with learning the choreography required to turn corners as a group. If a child expresses an interest in music have them explore different instruments. Music teachers can be found and instruments rented, so parents do not have to make a lifetime commitment to a piano.

Kids interested in drama or theater can create and perform daily plays for the family. They could build the stage and props for their performances. Avid readers can be encouraged to start a book club

with other readers or volunteer to read to younger children. Perhaps suggest that your children grow and tend a vegetable garden, then donate extra vegetables to your local food bank. Help children become involved in volunteering — many not-for-profits rely on volunteers to survive. Due to summer vacations, they often need additional volunteers around now. Call your local nursing home, ask if your children can bake cookies for the residents

a bike, go on a hike. Parents can set up a scavenger hunt or create an obstacle course; these activities involve physical movement and are great fun. Walking to the library to check out books could be a weekly adventure. Schedule time daily at your local park or playground — a bit of planning on your part can relieve summer boredom.

Children should be nudged to try things that interest them but not pressured into something they



and spend time visiting. Organize a group of children to clean up the yard of an elderly or disabled neighbor, an excellent way to build a foundation for community involvement.

It's important for children to stay active for health, however, there are many ways beyond sports to accomplish this. Encourage children to get outside and play, have a water balloon fight, walk the dog, ride



Strategies

do not enjoy. Sports should be fun; that's why we call them games. But, especially for younger kids, the emphasis should be on enjoyment and health, rather than competition. Swimming is an excellent way to exercise; your child might enjoy lessons to become a stronger swimmer. Many sports don't require being part of a team to participate — tennis, disc golf, cycling, running and kayaking, to name a few. Local parks and recreation districts often offer a range of activities for youth of all ages, year-round.

Whatever your child's passion — sports, writing, reading, cooking, music, the arts — get behind it. As parents, we are instrumental in helping our children succeed at what interests them most. Their pursuits may change as they grow, but experiencing more only serves to create a well-rounded adult.

Pendleton resident Virginia Justice has been a substitute teacher and a parks and rec volunteer. She and her husband have two college-aged daughters.

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