



Keeping kids active doesn't have to be expensive

Many people find their lives enriched by having children – emotionally or spiritually – but usually, not financially.

According to 2004 statistics*, it now costs about \$166,000 to raise one child to the age of 18 in Canada, not factoring in inflation.

Out of that total, about \$16,000 is spent on recreation, reading, gifts and school needs. That's a lot – but there are ways to keep kids active without spending so much money.

TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR INTERESTS

Before you sign your children up for expensive dance, art or horseback-riding classes, ask them what activities they'd like to participate in. It might turn out that they enjoy pursuits that are less costly. For example, cross-country skiing is less expensive than downhill skiing; it's

cheaper to buy a guitar than a piano for your budding musician.

Take advantage of local community programs like skate and ski exchanges to buy inexpensive sports equipment. And not every activity has to be so structured. Consider helping your kids organize informal pick-up games of soccer, road hockey, baseball or basketball. Don't rush to outfit your kids with top-of-the-line equipment for new activities until you're sure they're going to stick with them. And encourage your young bookworm to use the public library.

DON'T OVERDO IT

Consider limiting your children to one or two extracurricular activities at a time. There will be less cost to you, and it may actually be better for your children.

David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child*, believes parents are pushing their children too far, too fast. Today's parents think of their kids as "superkids," he





worries – so competent and mature that they don't even really need parents.

Similarly, in *The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap*, authors Alvin Rosenfeld and Nicole Wise wonder if in trying so hard to give children everything they can, parents have lost the ability to know how much is enough.

Leaving kids to their own devices more often may be both easier on your wallet and better for their imaginations, say these experts.

When you do want to enrol them in sports or other activities, save money by making use of community resources, such as low-cost neighbourhood arenas and swimming pools. Courses and classes offered by your city at local community centres are usually less expensive than those offered by private schools.

So, unplug the TVs and computers and send the kids out to play – and congratulate yourself for making a good parenting choice that didn't cost you a dime.

*From a database at the Manitoba Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

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