



## ***MAKE TIME FOR DOWN-TIME***

If your teenage children live wound-up, highly scheduled lives then they need to rediscover the lost art of down-town.

Down-time is like mucking around except that it's passive. It's about kids relaxing, doing whatever it is they feel like doing – whether that's watching a screen, hanging around with siblings or mates, reading a book or simply daydreaming.

There are three compelling reasons to allow kids down-time:

- It's great for mental health. Hard-driven kids need some time to rest their brains. The thinking wheels can't keep spinning all the time.
- It builds relationships. You've got to be close to someone to feel comfortable down-time with them. A household needs to be relaxed and free from tension for down-time to happen.
- It feels good, which is good reason to do something.

### **The art of down-time comes with age**

Toddlers are too active for down-time. Their physiology ensures that when they have some free time they'll generally keep moving and exploring.

Kids in primary school start to learn the value of down-time. They generally spend down-time on their own or by mucking around with their friends.

Teenagers are natural down-timers. They do it without trying. Teens take up a lot of space during down-time at home, tending to sprawl out and fill living rooms. Many don't mind down-time with their parents if their friends don't see them.

Many parents feel uncomfortable when their kids spend too long in down-time. Busyness is seen as a virtue. Sure, it's good for our kids to be occupied a lot of the time, but active lives need to be balanced with opportunities for inactivity.

### **Don't confuse down-time with brooding**

Brooding, like ruminating, involves a young person repeatedly revisiting their thoughts, going over past mistakes, or worrying about the future. Down-time is different as it enables a young person to chill out and relax. It's free-range mindfulness, or unstructured meditation.

Down-time is a lifetime mental health, relationship-building, and happiness habit. It's something to be encouraged, rather than clamped down.

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