

“My Child Is Exhausted”

Why it's important for children to get to their performing arts classes and how to help them juggle it all.

"Ugh! Ms. Carrie, I'm so exhausted! I don't know how I'm going to get all my homework done tonight!", says a teen dancer as she walks into class with laborious effort. "I have three tests tomorrow and five chapters to read tonight! I'm never going to get any sleep!"

These are common statements I hear from some of my teen students during the school year when they come into class. They are exhausted and stressed out beyond belief and some just can't manage. They tell me that they feel this way most of their day, which to me seems like a difficult way for them to navigate through their young lives. But, hey, life is difficult and this is good prep for reality! Unfortunately, the first thing to go in cases like this is their beloved performing arts classes; but there are other alternatives.

I feel for them and oftentimes wish I could march into the schools, stomp my foot and tell their teachers they are giving these kids way too much homework to do! How are these kids supposed to become and feel academically accomplished *and* have time to have healthy, diverse childhoods and adolescence? How are they going to transition into their adult lives with a balanced perspective on how to keep themselves healthy if they don't learn to find balance as kids? Well, in the majority of cases, I find the answer is that they come to class to do what they love anyway. They are better off for it and I'll tell you why.

As a certified Holistic Wellness Coach and the Director of the VPA Dance Company, I make it a priority to make sure the company dancers are consistently practicing and learning time management, nutrition, mindfulness and spirituality, even as young as 3rd grade. Part of the reason I sought out holistic wellness was so that I could help my students become the best versions of themselves. If they don't have balance, they are unhappy and get sick more easily, which is a lose-lose for everyone. I've found it's best to consider health from all angles rather than treating symptoms or reacting after it's too late.

Here are some tips that can really make a difference for young performing arts students who are struggling to make it all work:

- **Nutrition and sleep are important.** Are they eating breakfast? Are they eating enough balanced meals and snacks throughout the day? Are they eating at the right times? Are they getting enough sleep? I find that the students who do feel rested and eat small balance meals throughout the day (including breakfast) have the most energy and seem to glide through their young lives more easily and effortlessly. Because they include healthy protein, carbs and fats in each meal and snack, their blood sugar stays more stable and brain function is optimal for physical activity and schoolwork. I can't encourage nutrition enough as a first alternative when the going gets tough.
- **Time management must be learned and practiced.** First, are they doing too much? Maybe there are too many after school activities going on? While we want to let them explore as young children, there comes a time when they should decide what they really want to be focusing on. Maybe choose just one or two activities outside of school. Let them choose what they love when they feel ready to do that and then encourage them to stick to any commitments they have made. Second, teach them how to maintain a calendar. It takes a while to master time management skills. Even at young ages, they can start practicing this if parents allow and encourage it. Expect mistakes along the way. Mistakes offer powerful teachable moments.
- **Breaks are good.** When homework is heavy, it's good to stop and take a break for 1-2 hours. Think of it this way, they get up early and they are off to school all morning and early afternoon. Then they've got mentally challenging homework to complete. They deserve some time within each day to stop the academic work, and get outside or do an activity that they love. This will help them become happier, more balanced and more efficient in their studies. Their academic performance will actually improve. This is also a learned behavior and a great habit to carry with them throughout their lives.

Bottom line. Giving up something our kids love doing when times are stressful does not always need to be the first go-to answer. After these youngsters graduate from high school, they will be better equipped to face the challenges that adult life throws at them if they have developed good holistic habits and wellness beforehand.

Written by VPA Owner, Carrie Bohlmann