



Generation Real: The Playbook

**Practical, judgement-free guidance for families
ready to reclaim real-world childhood**

*Created by Youth Enrichment Brands
Advised by Erica Komisar & Jennifer B. Wallace*



Overview

This Playbook was built for parents who want to give their children more real-world experiences that cultivate confidence, resilience and joy. It was developed by Youth Enrichment Brands in partnership with two well-respected child development and parenting experts, Erica Komisar, LCSW, and Jennifer Breheny Wallace. It is organized into nine modules, which can be read in sequence or out of order. Each one offers something to think about, something to try, and something to watch for. Start with the module that speaks most directly to where your family is right now.

Our Brand Family

The Generation Real Project is an initiative of Youth Enrichment Brands, the parent organization behind four programs built on a shared conviction: that children develop confidence, resilience, and joy through real-world experiences in community with other kids. If you received this Playbook through one of our programs, this is the family it comes from.



Performance-based music education that goes beyond music lessons. Kids & adults learn guitar, bass, drums, keys, vocals & more, then rock live shows as bands on real stages. Ages 4 and up.

www.SchoolofRock.com



Immersive, sport-specific programs helping athletes take their skills to the next level. Licensed provider of Nike Sports Camps offering 20+ sports run by elite coaches. Our Camps division also includes KE Camps, NBC Camps, U.S. Baseball Academy, CMT Learning and Sports Camps Canada. Ages 7–18.

www.USSportsCamps.com



Fun-first youth sports programs, including leagues, camps, clinics, and trainings, that help kids build confidence, character, and skills in a positive, low-pressure environment. Ages 3–14.

www.i9Sports.com



Expert swim instruction that builds life-saving skills with a level-by-level curriculum tracking progress from first splash to competitive edge. Clear milestones, certified instructors. All ages.

www.SafeSplash.com

What's inside

Module 1: Why This Matters

The case for real-world childhood: what screens and achievement pressure are quietly displacing, and why the solution to both is the same.

Module 2: Know Where You Stand

An honest self-assessment to help you see your family's current relationship with screens and achievement pressure clearly, without judgment.

Module 3: The Substitution Principle

Why restriction alone is not a plan and how to replace what screens have displaced with experiences across four developmental domains that actually build something durable.

Module 4: Find Your Kid's Activity

A six-step framework for discovering real-world activities for your specific child that build confidence and joy.

Module 5: Screen-Smart, Not Screen-Free

How to think about healthy technology use, the difference between active and passive screen time, and screen-usage by age.

Module 6: Raising a Good Sport

What healthy competition actually looks like, how to talk to your child about envy and sportsmanship, and the difference between a parent's presence and a parent's pressure.

Module 7: How to Praise Your Child

The difference between conditional and unconditional acceptance and the specific language that builds character rather than anxiety over time.

Module 8: Family Challenges

Twelve low-lift actions families can start this week, including a 30-Day Tracker for logging real-world activities alongside screen time.

Module 9: For Parents Who Want to Go Deeper

Curated books, tools, research, and organizations for families ready to take the next step, including how to find a Youth Enrichment Brands program near you.

Foreword



A note from Rob Price, CEO of Youth Enrichment Brands

Parents keep telling me our programs saved their child. I always ask the question: saved them from what? The answer is almost always the same. Loneliness. And a world that stopped making room for them.

At Youth Enrichment Brands, we hear that same thing across School of Rock, i9 Sports, SafeSplash Swim School, US Sports Camps, KE Camps, NBC Camps, U.S. Baseball Academy, CMT Learning and Sports Camps Canada. Different activities, all with the same story.

Kids today are caught between two things pulling at them from opposite directions. Screens, which are built with the intention of capturing their attention and holding it for as long as possible, and a toxic achievement culture that's turned childhood into a résumé-building exercise before kids even know what they love. Both those things steal something real from a kid: **confidence, resilience, and joy.**

And what I've learned from those conversations is that parents don't need more alarm. They need a set of practical tools, grounded in real research, that make the next step feel possible.

That is what the Generation Real Playbook is.

Developed and written by Youth Enrichment Brands, with expert guidance from two trusted voices in child development, Erica Komisar and Jennifer B. Wallace, this Playbook draws on what we have learned from hundreds of thousands of families across our programs. The research is clear. The programs work. What families need is a bridge between the two.

You're building that bridge.

Read the full manifesto at substack.com/@generationreal



A note from Erica Komisar, LCSW

For over three decades, my clinical work has centered on one truth: children's emotional health is built on secure attachment, and that foundation doesn't stop mattering once they leave the nursery. What I see in my practice today are adolescents and young children whose attachment needs are going unmet in new ways, not only through parents who are absent, but also through parents who are physically present yet emotionally unavailable.

Secure attachment requires a trusted adult who is attuned, emotionally consistent, and able to co-regulate with a child. This process teaches a child to manage big feelings because it has been modeled for them, over and over, until they can do it themselves. When that attunement is interrupted, whether by technology or our modern-day achievement culture, children don't develop the internal resources they need. I see the result constantly in my office: children who are anxious and fragile, not because they lack ability, but because they haven't had enough embodied, relational experiences that teach their nervous systems what safety and connection feel like.

This is where I find real hope in real-world activities. Attachment isn't only built at home. Children develop a felt sense of security through a whole constellation of trusted relationships: a coach who notices when they're struggling, a music teacher who celebrates their small wins, teammates who depend on them and whom they can depend on in return. When a child shows up to swim practice or steps on stage with their bandmates, they are practicing being known and being challenged by a community that isn't going anywhere. This is co-regulation in action, and it is protective. It is also how children build the resilience to face difficulty: not by being shielded from it, but by discovering that they can face something hard and come through it supported.

This Playbook helps parents understand that enrichment activities aren't just extracurricular. They are attachment-building. They give children what secure development requires: consistency, presence, and belonging, delivered by real people, in real time.



A note from Jennifer Breheny Wallace

For nearly a decade, I have been studying what helps children thrive in a world that so often makes them feel they must earn their worth. Again and again, I have found that the children who are doing well are the ones who feel they matter, away from their accomplishments, to their families, friends, and wider community.

Mattering is the experience of feeling valued for who you are and knowing that you have something valuable to contribute. It answers two important questions running in the back of a child's mind: Am I worthy of attention and care? Do I have something meaningful to offer?

Too many children are absorbing a very different message: that their value depends on how well they perform. Real-world activities offer a powerful counterweight. A swim lesson, sports team, music program, or summer camp can become a place where a child is known beyond a score or skill. That is the deeper promise of enrichment. It is not simply to produce stronger swimmers, musicians, athletes, or students but to help children discover interests that tap into joy, relationships that make them feel connected, and contributions that make them feel useful.

This Playbook is designed to help parents follow their child's curiosity rather than cultural pressures and choose experiences that build confidence, connection, and a lasting sense of mattering.



Module 1:

Why This Matters

The Case for Real-World Childhood

“The world is being wired for solitude.”

ROB PRICE

There's a feeling a lot of parents share today that something has shifted. It happens when your child is present in the room but somewhere else entirely. When the conversations are shorter and the moments of connection that used to happen naturally seem harder to find. And somewhere between the scroll and the next notification, you question what they're getting from all of it, and what they might be missing.

If that sounds familiar, you're not imagining it, and you're definitely not alone.

What's actually happening

The research on kids and screens is well-documented, and you've probably already read more than enough of it. Although we've included a few key statistics we think are important below, what we want to do instead is offer something more useful than another warning: a clear picture of what's being displaced and what we can do about reclaiming it together.

4 in 10

teens say they're online almost constantly, with a majority using YouTube, TikTok or Instagram daily.¹

~5hrs

the number per day the average teen spends on social media.²

2X

the risk of poor mental health outcomes for children & teens spending 3+ hrs a day on social.³

When children spend hours a day on devices, whether it's scrolling, watching, or engaging with algorithmically curated content, it's not just time that passes; it's developmental time. Time that could be spent in conversation, in physical challenge, in creative risk-taking, in the kind of ordinary social friction that teaches children who they are in relation to other people.

¹ “Teens, Social Media and Technology”, Pew Research Center, 2025

² American Psychological Association, Monitor on Psychology, April 2024

³ “Social Media and Youth Mental Health”, U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023

Screen time crowds out the experiences children need to build confidence, resilience, and joy. Screens are not inherently evil, but they are extraordinarily effective at capturing attention that might otherwise go toward growing up. They are replacing time with family and friends, time spent outdoors, engagement in physical activity, and more.

The hours don't disappear. They get replaced.

WHAT SCREENS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND AI CROWD OUT

Hours spent on screens are hours that belonged to something else first. It is not screen time itself that causes the most harm, but what screen time quietly replaces.

TIME WITH FAMILY

Low-stakes moments like car rides, shared meals, and slow evenings are where children actually talk. Even if it's not about anything important, it builds trust.

FRIENDSHIP, IN PERSON

Negotiating, repairing, being left out, and showing up anyway. The friction of real friendship is not a problem to be avoided. It is how relational intelligence develops.

OUTDOORS & OPEN TIME

Unsupervised, unprompted time leaves children deciding what to do next which builds the capacity to be alone with oneself without immediately reaching for stimulation.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Movement affects how children sleep, how they manage their moods, and how well they are able to concentrate in the hours that follow.

TOLERANCE FOR DIFFICULTY

Learning a hard chord progression. Losing a match. Starting over after something doesn't work. A child who is always able to exit discomfort (by switching apps, finding another video, etc.) gets less practice at the thing difficulty is actually teaching.

BEING COUNTED ON

When a child is part of a band, a team, or an ensemble, their presence matters to other people. Their absence leaves a gap someone else has to fill. That experience of being genuinely needed by real people in a real place is a direct way a child learns that they matter.

There's a second force at work alongside screens that's worth naming, because many parents feel it even if they haven't quite put words to it: the pressure to raise accomplished children. The college essay that starts being written, mentally, when a child is seven. It shows up in the form of the travel sports team, the curated extracurricular résumé, the subtle but relentless message that a child's worth is tied to what they produce and how they perform.

These two forces — digital displacement and achievement pressure — often work in opposite directions and land on the same child. One removes the ballast of belonging. The other replaces curiosity, passion, and developing interests with pressure. Together, they are producing a generation that is simultaneously overstimulated and underlived.

The answer to both is the same: real-world experiences that are communal, low-stakes enough to be genuinely fun, and high-quality enough to build something durable.

Callout | Erica Komisar

Research on early screen exposure shows a correlation with emotional dysregulation that compounds across childhood. Children who have less access to unstructured play, face-to-face interaction, and physical activity (the experiences most displaced by screens) show more difficulty managing frustration, tolerating uncertainty, and self-regulating in social settings. The developmental cost isn't always visible immediately. It accumulates. The good news is the same: the investment in real-world experience also accumulates — and the research shows it's never too late to start.



The north star: competence produces confidence

Competence creates confidence. A child who feels genuinely capable by accumulating real evidence, through real experience, that they can try things and improve at them, is a fundamentally different child than one who has been optimized for performance. In psychologist Albert Bandura's research on self-efficacy, one of the most replicated bodies of work in developmental psychology, he found that a child's belief in their own capability is a stronger predictor of long-term motivation, persistence, and, inevitably, achievement than actual ability.⁴

Children don't need to be excellent. They need to feel capable.

⁴ "Self-efficacy: The theory at the heart of human agency", American Psychological Association, October 2025



That's what we're trying to protect. Not achievement, nor excellence, but the durable confidence that comes from showing up, getting back up, and belonging somewhere.

What we know from the families in our programs

We've had the privilege of seeing this and the general power of real-world enrichment on kids' wellbeing and development up close, across hundreds of thousands of families in our programs. Here's what the data tells us:

SCHOOL OF ROCK'S SOCIAL IMPACT STUDY

An independent study commissioned by School of Rock with Sound Diplomacy, a third-party research firm, drew on the survey responses from 1,443 parents of currently enrolled School of Rock students.

84.8%

of School of Rock parents saw gains in confidence and communication.⁵

87.1%

reported having more meaningful conversations with their child.⁵

88.3%

reported their child showing improvement in handling setbacks.⁵

⁵ Independent survey administered from 4/26-5/7/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,443 parents of School of Rock students under age 18. Informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

84.8% of parents reported meaningful progress in their child's confidence, communication, and ability to engage in group settings since joining School of Rock.⁵ This wasn't about musical proficiency. Parents described children who came out of their shells, made friends in places they didn't expect to, walked offstage after their first real performance and understood something about themselves that no algorithm could have taught them.

87.1% of parents reported better, more meaningful conversations with their child.⁵ These aren't better conversations about music, but better conversations, period. When a child has something they genuinely feel a part of, the connection between parent and child deepens too.

88.3% of parents reported their child showed improvement in handling setbacks and considering them learning opportunities.⁵ These are human outcomes, not just musical ones. The instrument is the mechanism, but healthy development is the point.

Read more on School of Rock's Social Impact Study in [Module 9](#)

i9 SPORTS' "SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SPORTS FOR GIRLS" SURVEY

i9 Sports surveyed customers who registered a female in their youth sports programs in the last 2 to 3 years. Parents were encouraged to take this survey with their girls to hear perspectives from both the parents and players. 1,500 parents responded to the survey with over half including their daughters ages 7 and up.

When parents were asked what they most hoped their daughters would gain from playing sports, **92% ranked confidence in the top three outcomes. 6 in 10 ranked it number one.**⁶ Not winning, college recruitment, or athletic achievement. *Confidence.*



What do parents hope their daughters gain from playing sports?

92% ranked confidence in the top 3.

6 in 10 parents ranked confidence as #1.



⁵ Independent survey administered from 4/26-5/7/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,443 parents of School of Rock students under age 18. Informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

⁶ Survey administered from 10/8-11/8/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,550+ parents who registered a female participant in i9 Sports' youth sport programs in the preceding 2-3 years. For informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

What keeps girls coming back?



And when girls themselves were asked what keeps them coming back to sports, the top answers were having fun, love of the sport, and feeling confident, with winning ranking at the very bottom of the list.⁶

Parents and children, independently, are telling us the same thing: what matters is not the scoreboard. What matters is how they feel about themselves when it's over.

Read more on i9 Sports' "Shaping the Future of Sports for Girls" survey in [Module 9](#).

Callout | Jennifer Breheny Wallace

In my research on achievement culture, I found that children who come to believe their worth depends on their performance tend to experience more anxiety and less intrinsic motivation. Children thrive when they feel valued for who they are at their core, separate from their achievements. Mattering—the sense that you are valued and have something valuable to contribute—is one of the strongest protective factors for children's well-being. Parents can help foster this sense of mattering by following their child's genuine interests and choosing environments where they feel known, supported, capable, and useful. Pay attention to how your child feels after an activity: Do they feel energized? Are they eager to return? Do they have room to struggle, improve, and belong without feeling constantly judged? The best enrichment experiences help children discover what brings them joy while strengthening the belief: I am valued. I have something valuable to offer. I matter.

A note on trade-offs

Parenting in this environment is genuinely hard. Screens aren't just a habit to break. They're the infrastructure of modern childhood. They're how kids connect with friends, do homework, decompress after difficult days, and participate in the culture of their generation. A child having a phone isn't a failure. It's a tool, and like most tools, the question is how it's being used and what it's being used instead of.

⁶ Survey administered from 10/8-11/8/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,550+ parents who registered a female participant in i9 Sports' youth sport programs in the preceding 2-3 years. For informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

The same honest acknowledgment applies to achievement pressure. Most parents who push hard to fill the schedule and to invest in the lessons, the travel teams, and the tutoring, do it because they love their children and are genuinely worried about their futures. The pressure doesn't come from selfishness but from fear. A world that signals constantly that opportunities are scarce and competition is fierce will naturally produce parents who respond by trying to give their children every possible advantage. That instinct is just love, operating in an anxious environment.

You're also likely navigating real constraints like schedules, budgets, geography, and a child who has opinions about everything that make the idealized version of an enriched, screen-free childhood feel far-reaching from the demands of a typical day.

This Playbook isn't about perfection. What we're offering is a set of invitations: small, practical, achievable shifts in how you think about your child's time, and what you put in front of them when that time is yours to shape.

We hope this Playbook makes it easier for you to take the next step, whatever that step is for your family.

This Playbook isn't about restriction alone. It's about substitution and supplementation.

The goal isn't to take something away. **Although the ability to do nothing sometimes and to feel bored is important for the development of frustration tolerance.** It's to give your child something better to do with their time. Preferably something that builds confidence, teaches them to recover from difficulty, and gives them a community they want to come back to.

Everything that follows in this Playbook is an invitation to try exactly that.

A NOTE ON SCOPE:

The majority of Youth Enrichment Brands' programs serve children ages 4 and up, in mostly ensemble and team-based settings. The guidance in this Playbook reflects that focus. For children under 4, the most powerful enrichment is the parent-child connection itself. Please refer to the work of Erica Komisar and other experts on this early stage of child development.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

- What does your child talk about without being asked?
- What do they bring up at dinner, in the car, or when you're doing something else entirely?

The things that light them up unprompted are often pointing toward where their real-world enrichment lives or where it's waiting to be found.

SOMETHING TO TRY:

This week, ask your child one question:

"If you could try anything at all what would it be?"

Don't filter the answer or evaluate it for practicality.
Just listen and write it down.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

Notice how your child seems after different types of activities:

- After screen time
- After creative time
- After physical activity
- After time with friends

What you observe is your most useful data.



Module 2: **Know Where** **You Stand**

A Simple, Honest Family Screen Audit

Before we talk about what to change, it helps to know where you actually are. Not where you think you should be or where you'd like to be, but where you actually are today.

This module is a short, honest self-assessment to take stock of your family's current relationship with screens and with achievement pressure. There are no right answers here, and no score that makes you a good or bad parent. At the end of it is simply a clearer picture of what's working, what might be worth looking at more closely, and where you might want to try something different.

Take ten minutes. Answer honestly. Nobody's grading this.

The Assessment

Read each question and note your first response. Try to resist the temptation to answer with what you wish were true. What is actually true for your family on a typical week? You can jot answers in a notebook, fill this out digitally, or simply sit with the questions and let them settle.

PART ONE: SCREENS AND TIME

1. How many hours per day does your child spend on screens?

Think about a typical weekday and a typical weekend day separately. Include phones, tablets, computers, and television. Don't include screens used for schoolwork.

Rough guide: Under 2 hours on weekdays is within most pediatric guidelines for school-age children. Over 4 hours on a typical day is worth paying attention to, because something else is likely being displaced.

2. Is your child's screen time mostly active or passive?

Think about the last three times you saw your child on a device. What were they doing? Were they actively engaged or passively consuming?

Active screen use means creating, communicating with people they know, or learning something they chose to learn. Passive screen use means scrolling, watching content that was recommended to them, or consuming without any particular intention.

3. When your child puts down a device, how do they typically seem?

Energized and ready to do something else? Flat, irritable, or difficult to engage? Somewhere in between?

This is one of the most useful observations a parent can make. The emotional state a child carries out of screen time tells you something that screen-time counts alone cannot.

4. Does your child have at least one regular real-world group activity?

Something they attend weekly or more, like a sport, a music program, a club, or a class. Somewhere they are in a room with other children doing something together.

If the answer is no, that's a starting point, not a failure. Module 4 is entirely dedicated to finding the right activity for your specific child.

5. When did you last do something creative or physical together as a family?

Something ordinary like a walk, a cooking project, a game, or a bike ride. Not something special like a vacation or event. Something that happened in the real world without a screen as the centerpiece.

6. How would you describe your own screen habits?

Are you often on your device in front of your kids? During family gatherings such as meals, movie nights, or in the car together? Is your usage primarily active or passive? How do you tend to feel after being on your phone or device?



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Callout | Erica Komisar

One of the most overlooked dimensions of screen behavior is what children learn from watching their parents. Children are exquisitely attuned to the gap between what adults say and what they do. A parent who asks their child to put down their phone while continuously checking their own is not sending a mixed message. They're sending a very clear one. Before we ask our children to change their relationship with screens, it's worth asking honestly: what relationship with technology are we modeling every day? The neurological case for protecting children from social media, particularly before age 16, is strong and growing. But the behavioral case for parental modeling may be equally powerful. What children observe their parents doing with technology shapes what they believe technology is for and its value.

PART TWO: ACHIEVEMENT AND PRESSURE

The next questions invite you to look not only at your child's experience but also at the messages you may be sending, often without realizing it.

Most parents who bring achievement pressure into the home do so from a place of love. We are trying to protect our children, prepare them for an uncertain future, and keep doors open for them. But even our best intentions can create pressure our children experience differently than we mean it.

These questions invite you to notice your patterns with curiosity rather than judgment.

7. How often do conversations about grades, performance, or achievement become tense for you, for your child, or for both of you?

Rarely? Occasionally? Often enough that you can predict how the conversation will unfold?

8. When you praise your child, what do you most often notice and name?

Their results—the grade, score, placement, or win? Or the qualities beneath the result: their effort, courage, growth, integrity, generosity, or the way they handled a setback?

There is nothing wrong with celebrating success. The question is whether your child also hears, consistently and clearly, that what you value most cannot be measured by a scoreboard or mastered skill.

9. When you talk about other people's children, or about the adults you admire, what do you tend to praise?

Their accomplishments, credentials, and status? Or their character, relationships, contributions, and the way they make other people feel?

Children learn what counts not only from what we say to them, but from what they hear us admire in everyone else.



10. Do you find yourself comparing your child with a sibling, classmate, teammate, or friend's child?

Do you say it aloud, hint at it indirectly, or keep the comparison silently in your own mind?

Comparison is deeply human. The important question is whether your child can feel it and whether they have begun to interpret another child's success as evidence of their own inadequacy.

A Note on Comparison and Social Media | Jennifer Breheny Wallace

Social media creates what researchers call a "social comparison trap" — an environment specifically engineered to make users measure their own lives against a curated highlight reel of everyone else's. For adolescents, whose sense of identity is still forming, this is particularly damaging. Every scroll produces new data points about who is prettier, more popular, more accomplished, more loved. The cumulative effect is a distorted benchmark against which no real life can compete. What I've seen in my research is that this erodes what I call "mattering," which is the deep, unconditional sense that you are valued for who you are, not for how you compare. A child who spends significant time in this environment is receiving thousands of daily signals that their worth is conditional, relative, and always up for reassessment. The antidote is not just less screen time. It's more experiences of unconditional regard: relationships, communities, and moments where a child is valued simply for showing up and being themselves.

11. Does your child experience your love as unconditional?

The question is not whether you love your child regardless of how they perform, because of course you do. The question is whether *they* know it deep inside. When they fail, lose, disappoint you, or fall short of their own expectations, do they still feel secure in your warmth and regard or do they become anxious, ashamed, or eager to win back your approval?

12. How much truly unstructured time does your child have each week, as time with no goal or instruction, just to play, rest, daydream, or be with friends without an adult impacting the experience?

In a culture that treats every open hour as an opportunity for improvement, unstructured time can look unproductive, but children need periods when no one is evaluating them and when they are free to discover what interests them.



Parent Tip: Put downtime on the calendar and protect it as firmly as you would a practice, lesson, or game.

13. Does your child know what you are most proud of about them, and is your answer about more than what they have achieved?

Could your child tell you the qualities you cherish most in them? Their kindness, humor, courage, loyalty, curiosity, or the way they care for other people?

Pay attention to what you praise most often. Children hear praise not only as encouragement but also as information about what matters most to us.

WHAT YOUR ANSWERS MEAN

There is no score here. Parenting is far too complicated to reduce to a number. These questions are designed to surface patterns of the things you may already sense but have not yet found the words to name. Approach your answers with curiosity and compassion. Awareness gives us the chance to make more deliberate choices.

If your screen-time answers pointed to long hours and mostly passive consumption:

That is worth taking seriously because time is finite. Several hours on a screen can crowd out the experiences children need to thrive, like sleep, movement, face-to-face connection, and play.

Screens will be part of childhood. The question is whether the rest of childhood still has enough room. Modules 3 through 6 will help you create more space for those essential experiences.

If your answers pointed to lower screen use, more active engagement, and at least one regular real-world activity:

You may already be doing more right than you realize. Your next question might be: What is already working, and how can I protect and build on it? This Playbook will offer practical ways to strengthen the foundation you have created.

If the questions about achievement pressure made you uncomfortable:

Discomfort can be a sign that you are reflecting honestly. Parents often lean on achievement pressure because they love their children fiercely and feel responsible for preparing them for an uncertain future.

Does your child experience your attention as confidence and support? Or do they feel that they are being continuously measured? Can they feel your hopes for them alongside the security of your unconditional love?

Module 7 will help you explore these questions more deeply.

If you found yourself wanting to skip the achievement questions:

That is something to pay attention to as well. The questions we want to rush past often trigger something uncomfortable within us or may reveal a pattern that has become so familiar we barely see it anymore.



Where Youth Enrichment Brands Stands on Screens and Social Media

Screen time is not a single thing. A child video calling a grandparent, practicing an instrument with a learning app, or building something in a coding program is using a screen very differently than a child scrolling an algorithmically curated social feed at midnight. The former involves agency, intention, and often connection. The latter is a system built by engineers to make stopping feel harder than continuing. Treating all screen time as equivalent misses the most important distinction available to parents.

What the research is consistent on is that screens themselves are not harmful, it is the absence of what is displaced by them that is harmful. When screen time crowds out sleep, physical activity, face-to-face interaction, creative play, and unstructured time, the developmental cost accumulates. Not dramatically, not all at once, but steadily. The hours get replaced by something that does less for a child's growth than what it pushes out.

On screen time generally, the guidance we find most useful comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics⁷: meaningful limits on recreational screen time for school-age children, no screens in bedrooms at night, and an ongoing family conversation about what screens are being used for and why. We recommend using these as norms to build toward, adjusting as your child grows and your family's circumstances change.

On social media specifically, our position is more direct:

Youth Enrichment Brands supports a minimum age of 16 for social media access & smartphone usage.

Smartphones are too tempting to children who cannot regulate the addictive nature of them. Psychologist and author Jean Twenge, in her monumental work on the introduction of smartphones⁸, identified that children can stay in touch with their parents through flip phones but do not need the added and overstimulating features of smartphones.⁹ It is not just social media that is the problem, but the usage of smartphones that gives children access to social media. There are wonderful choices today of “dumb” phones which may be smarter for parents to buy for children under the age of 16. It also helps to have a community of parents who share the same values as you do regarding phone and social media usage so you are not battling the constant, “*but Emma’s parents allow her to use an iPhone and social media.*”

Most children are accessing social media well before age 16, with half of children owning a smartphone

⁷ “Screen Time Guidelines.” American Academy of Pediatrics, 2025

⁸ Twenge, Jean. *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*. Atria Books, 2017

⁹ Twenge, Jean. *10 Rules for Raising Kids in a High-Tech World*. Outspoken Press, 2025.

by age 11 and the research on the effects of early social media and smartphone access, particularly on girls, and particularly during the critical years of identity formation¹⁰, is serious enough that we believe a clear position is more useful to families than a vague caution.

The neurological argument is straightforward. The adolescent brain is still developing the capacity for self-regulation, perspective-taking, and emotional stability, while social media platforms are engineered by teams of adults to maximize engagement and produce exactly the emotional responses that make self-regulation hardest. Putting an immature and impressionable brain in regular contact with a system specifically designed to override its defenses is not a neutral act.

The social argument is equally clear. The social comparison that social media produces is how these platforms keep users engaged and its effect on young people's sense of their own worth is documented, consistent, and harmful.

We are not asking you to adopt our position as a rule, just that you consider it as a data point and make your own decision with that information in hand.



This Is Not a Diagnosis

The point of this assessment is to give you a clearer picture of where your family is so that the rest of this Playbook can be as useful as possible.

Most parents who take the time to read a document like this are already paying attention. They already care, and that's most of the battle. The questions that made you pause are worth returning to. The ones that felt easy might be worth a second look. And whatever picture emerged, the next module has something useful for you.

10 Barzilay, R., Pimentel, S.D., Tran, K.T., Visoki, E., Pagliaccio, D., & Auerbach, R.P. (2025). "Smartphone Ownership, Age of Smartphone Acquisition, and Health Outcomes in Early Adolescence." *Pediatrics*, 157(1), e2025072941.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Which question in this assessment surprised you most, and what does that surprise tell you?

SOMETHING TO TRY:

Pick one question from Part Two of the Assessment and bring it into a conversation with your partner, a close friend, or even your child, as a genuine question you're sitting with. ***"I've been thinking about how often I praise effort versus results. What do you notice?"***

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

For the next week, notice your own device use in moments when your child is present. Observation is the first step to anything.



Module 3: The Substitution Principle

Don't just limit screens. Replace what screens replaced.

Restriction without replacement is only half a solution.

Taking a phone away, setting a screen limit, and enforcing a no-devices rule at dinner all have value, but on their own, none of these give your child somewhere better to be. And a child with free time, no one to connect with, and nothing meaningful to fill it with, will often find their way back to the easiest available option.

Kids, especially teens, are more likely to turn to screens and social media when they are lonely, anxious, and depressed. Not the other way around. What's crucial is providing them with relationships, mentorship and programs that are welcoming and safe, to build the skills they need for the future.¹¹

The question this module answers is not, "How do I get my child off their screens?" It's, **"Who and what do I put in front of them instead?"**



The Four Developmental Domains

The answer is organized around four developmental domains: four categories of real-world experience that research consistently shows are essential to a child's growth into a confident, resilient, connected human being. A rich childhood draws from all four. Not every child needs every domain in equal measure, but the most thriving kids tend to have at least one meaningful anchor in each.

¹¹ Odgers, Candice. "What we're getting wrong about teens and tech." TED, 2026, [ted.com](https://www.ted.com/talks/candice-odgers-what-we-re-getting-wrong-about-teens-and-tech).

Four domains build the character screens can't replicate



● PHYSICAL — The Confidence to Fall

Sports teach kids mistakes aren't catastrophic.

● ARTISTIC — The Courage to Perform

Music and theatre build vulnerability in front of others.

● INTELLECTUAL — Thinking Out Loud

Debate is forged in contact with other minds, not passive consumption.

● SOCIAL & COMMUNITY — Team Over Trophy

Growth happens in groups. Everyone mentors; everyone is mentored.

DOMAIN 1: PHYSICAL

Movement, sport, moderate risk, and the confidence to fall

There's a kind of confidence that can only be built in a body.

There's a type of confidence that does not come from being told you're capable, but that comes from discovering you are. It comes from learning that you can fall and get back up. It is knowing that your body and your will, tested against real physical challenge, is more capable than you thought.

This is what physical activity gives children that no screen can replicate. It produces something deeper than fitness. It produces a lived experience of understanding their own capacity and limitations.

The activities that build this kind of confidence are broad: team sports, swimming, martial arts, dance, climbing, hiking, cycling, gymnastics. What they share is that they ask something of a child physically, put them in contact with other people, and give them repeated opportunities to try something difficult in a low-stakes environment.

A NOTE ON DIFFERENTLY-ABLED CHILDREN:

Physical challenge looks different for every child, and that is exactly the point. A child with a physical limitation is not excluded from this domain, and may actually be the most powerful example.

The confidence that comes from discovering what your body can do is available to every child, because it is defined by each child's own baseline, not by any external standard of performance.

A child with limited mobility who learns to swim independently has experienced something as developmentally significant as any runner crossing a finish line. A child who uses a wheelchair and joins a seated volleyball league has learned something real about persistence and belonging. When looking for activities in this domain, seek programs with adaptive options and instructors trained to meet children where they are.

SafeSplash Swim School, for example, works with children across a wide range of physical abilities. The goal is the experience of the water and the confidence that follows from learning to move through it. The physical domain is about discovering what your body can do.

A realistic example: A seven-year-old joins a recreational soccer league. She doesn't score a goal for the first three weeks. She's frustrated. She wants to quit. Her parents encourage her to stay through the season. By week six, she makes a pass that leads to a goal. She doesn't stop talking about it for days because she discovered that persistence produces results. That's a life lesson, not a soccer lesson.

SafeSplash Swim Schools tells a version of the same story in a different medium. Learning to swim is one of the earliest experiences a child can have of genuine physical challenge. Although they begin by flailing, they are supported by an instructor who meets them where they are, and eventually succeed at something that felt impossible. Every swimmer who moves up a level carries that evidence with them: I tried something hard, and I got there.

Callout | Erica Komisar

In my clinical work, I see the impact of over-protection in childhood. Many children are so shielded from failure and discomfort that they arrive at adolescence without the emotional immune system they need to navigate ordinary difficulty. Moderate physical risk-taking such as climbing a tree, learning to fall safely in martial arts, pushing through the discomfort of a hard practice, is not dangerous parenting. It is developmentally protective parenting. This applies to children of all abilities. The child who falls off the bike and gets back on is building something invisible but durable: the knowledge that difficulty is survivable. That knowledge is one of the most protective things a child can carry into the teenage years. Letting your child struggle physically, within appropriate limits for their individual needs, is not neglect. It is one of the kindest things you can do for their long-term resilience.



DOMAIN 2: ARTISTIC

Music, theatre, creative expression, and performing for others

There is a specific kind of courage that artistic activities build: the courage to be seen.

The artistic domain involves having the courage to stand in front of other people and do something that reveals who you are. It could be performing a piece of music you practiced for months, speaking lines in a play, showing a painting you made. In each of these moments, a child makes themselves vulnerable in a way that is fundamentally different from anything that happens on a screen.

Social media lets children curate how they appear. Artistic performance does not. You step on stage, and the audience sees you — uncertain, hopeful, imperfect, and entirely yourself. For many children, especially those who struggle with self-consciousness or perfectionism, this experience is transformative precisely because it cannot be edited.

Artistic activities also offer something else that screens cannot: the experience of working toward something over time. A performance is usually weeks or months in the making. The child who walks offstage after their first real performance has done something that they've discovered, through experience, they are actually capable of. No algorithm can teach them that.

The School of Rock Social Impact Study

The data from School of Rock's independent Social Impact Study, which is summarized in [Module 1](#) and detailed in [Module 9](#), tells this story in numbers. But one of the most striking finding is the one that has nothing to do with a musical instrument: **96.2% of parents reported noticeable progress in their child's self-confidence since they started attending School of Rock.**⁵ These students don't just grow as musicians; they grow emotionally, creatively, and socially.

DOMAIN 3: INTELLECTUAL

Debate, collaboration, and problem-solving with peers

Intelligence, like confidence, is not built in isolation.

The passive consumption of information, however well-curated and educational, does not build critical thinking. Discussion does. Argument does. The experience of defending a position in front of peers who

5 Independent survey administered from 4/26-5/7/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,443 parents of School of Rock students under age 18. Informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

will push back, of having to change your mind in real time because someone made a better point, or collaborating with a group toward a shared solution, are the types of experiences that turn information into understanding. This is also worth naming directly in an age of AI. When a child can ask a chatbot for the answer and receive it instantly, they are not developing the capacity to find the answer themselves, and the difference between those two things is precisely what collaborative intellectual activity is designed to build.

The productive discomfort of thinking alongside other minds is what peer-based intellectual activities give children that individual study, tutoring, and even classroom instruction often cannot. The key is not just to absorb ideas, but to wrestle with them; to find the answer, comprehend it, test it, and share it.

Academic debate, Model UN, Robotics, chess clubs, science fairs with a team component, math challenges that require collaborative reasoning, all share the demand that children think actively, communicate under pressure, and engage with perspectives other than their own.

A realistic example: A ten-year-old joins a school robotics team. The first few weeks are challenging. The team can't agree on how to approach the problem they've been given, and she struggles to make her ideas heard. By the end of the season, she has learned to code a basic function, to argue for her approach clearly, and to compromise when someone else's idea is better. All of those skills were built, not taught.

The FIRST Longitudinal Impact Study

Brandeis University completed a decade-long study that followed 1,273 FIRST participants and a matched comparison group over ten years across three of FIRST's robotics programs. When participants were asked what had stayed with them from the experience after 10 years, they most often cited leadership, teamwork, effective problem solving, communication, and the ability to present in public. These were not just memories: participants described drawing on these skills actively in their work and professional lives a decade later.¹²

What's notable across this research is that FIRST participants' strongest reported gains were interpersonal and dispositional. These are precisely the outcomes that competitive intellectual challenge in a team setting is designed to produce, and they appear to outlast the program itself by years.

DOMAIN 4: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

Belonging, feedback loops, communal identity, and collaborative competitiveness

The best thing a real-world group activity gives a child is not a skill. It's a community.

Whether in the form of a team, a band, a class, or a family unit, the aim is a group of children who share something like a common goal, practice space, household chore, or season, and contribute to something together. This is the social-emotional domain, and in many ways, it's foundational to the other domains.

12 Meschede, T. et al. The FIRST® Longitudinal Study Final Report. Brandeis University, Sept 2024

Children develop emotionally through contact with other people, not through content about other people. The real-time, unpredictable, sometimes uncomfortable experience of being in a room with peers who see them, respond to them, challenge them, and may need them, is essential to healthy growth.

When a child has a bad rehearsal and a bandmate stays afterward to help them work a beat change, that child has learned something about caring for and helping others. When a team loses and comes back the next week anyway, that child has learned something about resilience. When a child who has always been shy earns the trust of an instructor who knows their name and notices when they're struggling, that child has learned something about belonging.

A NOTE ON SCOPE:

This Playbook focuses on children in group and ensemble-based activities. We believe that the four domains above are most richly experienced in community (on teams, in bands, in groups).



i9 Sports' "Shaping the Future of Sports for Girls" survey

Drawing on responses from more than 1,500 parents and daughters, this survey offers a useful window into what the social-emotional domain actually produces. Across all the outcomes parents hoped sports would deliver, **confidence ranked in the top three for 92% of respondents.**⁶ When the girls were asked separately what keeps them coming back, the answers clustered around the same things: fun, love of the sport, and feeling confident. Winning appeared at the bottom of both lists.

Parents enrolling their daughters and daughters choosing to return are independently pointing toward the same outcomes which was not performance, but how they feel about themselves within the community of the activity. That is the social-emotional domain doing exactly what it is designed to do.

Some of the deepest confidence grows from being trusted, from being relied upon, and from discovering through experience that they can do this. Giving them opportunities to contribute to a communal effort doesn't have to be in the form of an entertaining activity. It can also be in the form of responsibility.



Parent Tip: When thinking about reducing screen time, we usually ask *"What can I get them to do instead?"* Rather, try asking *"How can I get them engaged with others to help or create connection?"*

⁶ Survey administered from 10/8-11/8/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,550+ parents who registered a female participant in i9 Sports' youth sport programs in the preceding 2-3 years. For informational purposes only. Learn more in [Module 9](#).

Collaborative Competitiveness: A New Way to Think About Competition

Most of us grow up thinking of competition as a zero-sum game: someone wins, someone loses, and your job is to be the one who wins. That framework has its place, but it is incomplete, and when it becomes the only framework, it produces children who are anxious about performance, reluctant to help peers who might outperform them, and who measure their worth entirely by outcomes they can't always control.

Collaborative competitiveness offers a different frame: your personal accomplishments are meaningful, but what's equally admirable is how you contribute to your teammates and to your team.

In a truly collaborative competitive environment, everyone gets to be a mentor and a mentee. The child who is the best player on the team is the one who teaches the child still learning, who in turn becomes the best player on the team, and teaches the next one. The cycle creates something that individual achievement never can: a community where each person's growth contributes to everyone else's.

Teaching a child the satisfaction of watching someone else thrive because of their help is one of the most protective things we can do for a young person's mental health. A child who adds value to others does not measure their worth entirely by a scoreboard. A child who is needed by their team does not wonder whether they matter. The contribution itself is the answer.

A Note on Mattering | Jennifer Breheny Wallace

Research on resilience points to mattering as one of the strongest protective factors for children's well-being. Mattering has two essential parts: feeling valued and knowing you have value to add. Children need both.

A child may feel deeply loved at home and still need opportunities to discover that they can make a difference beyond it. Contributing to a team, helping a younger player, or serving a community teaches a child that they are needed.

Real-world group activities are especially powerful because they make that contribution tangible. Teammates rely on you, your effort affects the group, and your absence is noticed. These are physical, present, accountable relationships with people who can feel the impact you make. That experience of feeling known, depended on, and useful to others helps children build a deep, durable sense of mattering and the resilience to withstand stress, setbacks, and uncertainty.

For more on this framework, we encourage you to read *Mattering: The Secret to a Life of Deep Connection and Purpose*. See [Module 9](#).

The Insight That Ties It All Together

Character is formed through repeated, shared experience.

Despite our impulses, character is not built through individual achievement or optimized solo practice. It is built by consistently showing up, with other people, and being changed by the experience of doing so.

Real-world enrichment doesn't just give children skills and confidence, it gives them a true sense of self that is forged through contact with a community, tested against real challenge, and sustained by the experience of belonging to something larger than oneself.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Which of the four domains is most represented in your child's current life? Which is missing or underrepresented? You don't need to fill all four at once, but knowing where the gaps are is the first step toward filling them.

SOMETHING TO TRY:

Look at the four domains and pick the one where your child has the least exposure right now. Over the next two weeks, find one low-commitment entry point in that domain (a trial class, a community program, a school club) and mention it to your child. Present it as an invitation, not an assignment:
"I heard about this. It sounds kind of interesting. Want to check it out?"

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

Notice which domain your child naturally gravitates toward when they have unstructured time. Where they return to unprompted, even in small, informal ways, often points toward where their most meaningful engagement lives.



Module 4: **Find Your** **Kid's 'Thing'**

Identifying Your Kid's Thing and Redefining Success

There are many reasons why after-school activities are a great antidote to digital displacement; not only do they take up the time and space that would otherwise be consumed by a screen, they also offer real benefits physically, academically, and socially for children.

Research spanning more than a decade consistently shows that children and youth in afterschool and structured enrichment programs demonstrate reduced chronic absenteeism, improved academic performance, and a stronger sense of connection to school than their non-participating peers.¹³

This section will walk you through how to curate a list of age-appropriate activities, share them with your child, and find the one that sticks through an appropriate trial-and-error framework.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This exercise has a single rule that matters more than any other:

Follow your child's lead.

The goal of this exercise is to find an activity your child is genuinely interested in rather than an activity your child is good at. Those two things are not the same, and confusing them is a common mistake parents make.

Callout | Jennifer Breheny Wallace

Following your child's lead does not mean your child needs to know exactly what they love or that you should let them quit the moment something becomes difficult. Your role is to open doors, offer encouragement, and pay attention to your child's energy around the activity.

Put another way: the goal is not to find the activity your child is best at—or the one most likely to “unlock their potential”—but to find experiences that help your child feel engaged, connected, capable, and more fully themselves.

Pay attention to the fuel driving the activity. **Clean fuel** comes from curiosity, enjoyment, connection, growth, and the satisfaction of doing something meaningful. **Dirty fuel** comes from comparison, status, fear of disappointing others, or the belief that achievement is what makes a child worthy.

¹³ [“The Latest Research on the Impact of Afterschool and Summer Programs.” Afterschool Alliance, Sept 2024](#)

A burned-out child with a shelf full of trophies is not the goal. A child who feels energized, engaged, and eager to return is. Keep that distinction close as you work through this guide.

Step 1: Build the Wide List

The first step is to build what we call the Wide List — a broad, generous, judgment-free collection of activities your child might try. The list should be a genuinely diverse one without ranking.

Why wide?

Because children often don't know what they love until they've been briefly exposed to it. The kid who ends up living for lacrosse may never have asked for lacrosse. The kid who discovers she has a gift for performance may have been too shy to sing. Breadth in the consideration set is what makes discovery possible.

Why a list and not just one option at a time?

Because the list itself is a conversation. When you sit down with your child and go through it together, you learn things. You will see what lights them up, what makes them recoil, what surprises them. That information is valuable regardless of what they ultimately choose.



Keep the list wide and the introduction narrow.

One important caveat:

The list is wide, but the introduction is narrow. Don't present ten activity options at once. Research on choice is clear on this: too many options produce anxiety, not enthusiasm. The Wide List is for you to draw from, but you should introduce one activity at a time. The younger the child, the shorter the list should be. The older the child, the greater their capacity to deal with choice.



What the Research Says | Erica Komisar

Increasing the number of options available to people consistently produces higher levels of anxiety and lower satisfaction with whatever is ultimately chosen, rather than making decisions easier. In the book *The Paradox of Choice*, psychologist Barry Schwartz calls this "the paradox of choice": more options feel like more freedom, but they function more like paralysis.¹⁴ The same dynamic applies to children. When a child is presented with too many activities simultaneously, the cognitive and emotional load of comparing them crowds out the simple, instinctive response you're actually trying to surface — *that sounds fun*.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR WIDE LIST

When coming up with activities to include in your Wide List, it helps to think across four developmental domains. A good list draws from all four to give yourself real, diverse options to draw from. But there is no need for your child to try everything,

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Movement, sport, water, outdoor challenge

These build the confidence that comes from learning what a body can do. They teach children that effort produces results, that falling down is survivable, and that showing up matters.

Examples: *team sports leagues, swimming, gymnastics, martial arts, climbing, hiking, cycling, tennis, golf, yoga for kids, outdoor adventure programs*

Best age to start:

Most physical activities welcome children from age 3 onward, though the right fit depends on your child's readiness and the program's structure. A general principle: if a program offers a beginner class or recreational tier, your child is probably ready to try it.

- Recreational sports leagues (like i9 Sports) typically begin at age 3–5 with an emphasis on fun and basic movement.

★ **Some organizations we recommend:**

i9 Sports	US Sports Camps
NBC Camps	SafeSplash Swim School
KE Camps	U.S. Baseball Academy
Saf-T-Swim	U.S. Softball Academy
KidStrong	Miller Swim School
Avid4Adventure	Euro Sports Camps

¹⁴ Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. ECCO, 2004

- Swim lessons (SafeSplash) are appropriate from infancy (4+ mos), with structured skill-building beginning around age 3–4.
- Martial arts and gymnastics are well-suited to ages 4 and up, offering the added benefit of individual skill progression alongside group participation.
- Outdoor adventure programs (like Avid4Adventure) typically begin at age 5–6.
- Competitive leagues, travel sports, and skill-specific camps become more available and developmentally appropriate for teens.

A note on swimming:

Most activities on your wide list are best introduced when a child expresses some interest or curiosity. Swimming is an exception. Swim lessons develop practical water safety skills that have value independent of whether a child ever pursues swimming as an activity they love. Parents do not need to wait for a child to ask. Starting early gives children the survival skills to be safer in and around water, regardless of what else ends up on their list. Swimming is also a great option for children across a wide range of physical abilities.



ARTISTIC AND PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Music, theatre, visual art, creative writing, filmmaking

These teach children to take risks in front of other people, to work toward a performance, and to find a personal creative voice. They build the specific kind of courage that comes from being seen.



Examples: *learning an instrument, band, performance-based music programs, dance, drama club, improv, choir, drawing and painting classes, pottery, film or photography*

★ Some organizations we recommend:

School of Rock

Tutu Dance School

Children's Art Classes

Nike Dance Camp

Best age to start:

Artistic and performance activities can begin earlier than most parents expect. Music exposure and creative play are beneficial from infancy. Structured music instruction typically begins around age 4–6 for most programs.

- School of Rock's performance-based programs begin at age 6 and are designed for children with no prior experience. Their model is built around learning by doing, not prerequisite skills.
- Dance and movement programs like Tutu School welcome children from age 6 months, with classes structured around exploration and joy at younger ages and more intentional technique from age 5+.
- Theatre and improv programs can begin as early as age 3.
- Visual art classes are available at nearly any age, with more formal skill developmental happening from age 6 onward.

For teens, performance-based programs offer the added benefit of stage experience and ensemble work, which build a specific kind of confidence that is particularly valuable during adolescent identity formation.

INTELLECTUAL AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

Activities that involve thinking, debating, building, and problem-solving alongside peers.

These teach children that intelligence is active, not passive, and that working through disagreement with other people is a skill worth developing.

Examples: *robotics, coding, math enrichment, debate, Model UN, chess, science programs, academic camps, Lego or maker programs*

Best age to start:

Intellectual and collaborative activities span a wide age range, and the right entry point depends heavily on the specific program.

- Chess clubs and maker/Lego programs are well-suited to children ages 5 onward and are among the best early introductions to collaborative problem-solving.
- FIRST Robotics programs span ages 5-18.
- Mathnasium and similar math enrichment programs serve children from kindergarten through high school, meeting each child at their current level.
- Model UN and academic summer programs are usually appropriate for ages 12 and up, although they generally accept students starting at age 9.

★ Some organizations we recommend:

Mathnasium
FIRST

CMT Learning
Model UN



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A useful rule of thumb: if a program is organized in teams or groups, and involves building or solving something together rather than individual study, it belongs on your wide list regardless of your child's current academic level.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Activities that are primarily about belonging, contribution, and connection.

These teach children that being part of something larger than themselves is one of the most satisfying experiences available. They are the original antidote to loneliness.

Examples: community service programs, volunteering, youth groups, scouting, cooking or baking classes, gardening, animal care

★ Some organizations we recommend:

Apex Leadership Co. Humane Society
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

Best age to start:

Social and community activities are appropriate at virtually every age, and in many ways, they are the most flexible category to introduce.

- Community service opportunities exist for families with children as young as 4 (simple acts like donating items or participating in a neighborhood event) and scale up meaningfully as children grow.
- Scouting programs typically begin at ages 5–7 and offer particularly strong foundations for belonging and communal identity.
- Cooking/baking classes are appropriate from age 4+, with many programs designed specifically for kids in this range.
- Big Brothers Big Sisters pairs children ages 6–18 with mentors in structured, long-term relationships that research consistently shows are protective for children's development.



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For teenagers specifically, community-based activities such as volunteer roles, leadership programs, and local initiatives carry additional developmental weight: teens who feel they are contributing something real to a community beyond their family develop a stronger sense of mattering, which is one of the most protective factors available for adolescent wellbeing.

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Stay focused on finding your child an activity that unlocks their joy. This may be a different activity than the one they are good at or the one all the other kids seem to be doing.

Children do not develop a strong sense of who they are simply by being told they are smart, talented, or exceptional. They build it by experiencing the feeling of being deeply known. ***You see how my mind works. You notice what brings me alive. You understand what matters to me.***

That distinction is especially important when choosing enrichment activities. Parents naturally notice the strengths that are easiest to measure: the fastest time, the highest score, the starring role, and the advanced group. But some of a child's most important strengths will not appear on a report card, scoreboard, or college application.

A child may be good at making newcomers feel welcome, organizing a group, caring for animals, making people laugh, repairing things, or asking unusual, thought-provoking questions. The goal is to understand the qualities that make your child feel most like themselves.

WHAT TO OBSERVE

Rather than asking only, "What is my child good at?", consider paying attention to:

ENERGY

What leaves your child energized rather than depleted?

INITIATIVE

What do they begin without being asked?

ATTENTION

What holds their focus?

CONNECTION

In what settings (big or small) do they seem most comfortable and socially engaged?

CURIOSITY

What do they ask questions about or talk about on their own?

CONTRIBUTION

When do they enjoy organizing, creating, or making something better for someone else?

PERSISTENCE

What are they willing to struggle with because the activity itself matters to them?

AUTHENTICITY

Where do they seem least concerned with impressing others and most free to be themselves?



When you notice a strength, describe it specifically.

Move beyond broad praise such as “You’re amazing” or “You’re a natural.” Instead, try:

- *I noticed how patient you were when the project was not working.*
- *You seemed happiest when you were helping the younger kids.*
- *You ask questions that help everyone think differently.*
- *You kept practicing even when no one was reminding you.*
- *You made sure the new person was included.*
- *You seemed completely absorbed while you were building that.*
- *You looked proud of the solution you came up with.*

Once adults recognize a strength in a child, it is easy to turn that strength into a project, like another program, a more elite team, or a bigger commitment. We begin imagining where the talent could lead and, without meaning to, we can crowd out the conditions that allowed it to grow in the first place.

A child’s interests need room to remain playful, imperfect, and fully their own. Ask: *What is this activity building inside my child? Is it giving them **clean fuel** (curiosity, connection, growth, joy, or contribution)? Is it helping them discover something true about who they are? Do they feel known here? Do they have something meaningful to offer?*

The best enrichment gives a child a place to become more fully themselves and strengthens them from the inside out.

WHAT TO PRIORITIZE WHEN CHOOSING ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR LIST

Group over solo.

Solo activities have real value, but for the purpose of this exercise, prioritize activities that put your child in a room with other kids. Character is often built in relation to other people and where there is a feedback loop that teaches what it means to be seen, be held accountable, and belong to something.



Passion over prestige.

Ask yourself honestly: is this on the list because your child might love it, or because it would look good or develop a useful skill? Both can be true, but if prestige is the primary driver, the activity belongs lower on your list, not higher.

Fun over rankings.

An activity your child dreads attending is not building confidence. It may be building resentment. At this stage, the most important outcome is that they want to come back next week.

Accessible and realistic.

Be sure to present activities that your child can actually get to, afford to participate in, and sustain across a season. Your local Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of programs for children that are likely the most affordable option.

A NOTE ON ACCESS:

If your Wide List feels limited by what's affordable or reachable, that is not a reflection of your commitment as a parent. It is a reflection of a gap that communities, organizations, and policymakers have a responsibility to close. Real-world enrichment should not be a privilege. Build the widest list you can with what is genuinely available to your family. The work of expanding what's available belongs to all of us — not to you alone.

Youth Enrichment Brands partners with **Play Without Limits** to help remove financial barriers and give more children access to sports, music, and other enriching youth programs. Through full-tuition scholarships, Play Without Limits connects underserved kids with high-quality camps and programs led by experienced instructors. The goal is to make these opportunities available not just today, but for generations to come.

Step 2: Have the Conversation

Once you have your list, find a time to sit down with your child, in an informal way, like at the kitchen table, on the drive home, or before bed and share the list with them. Go through each activity together.

Reminder to keep the number of activities you present to them in each sit-down to a minimum. We recommend no more than three for younger children ages 3-8 and no more than six for older children and teens, ages 9-17.

Your job in this conversation is to listen for genuine reactions. Watch for:

Eyes lighting up. Even a small flash of interest is worth noting.

Any acknowledgement of past interest or curiosity.

Questions. A child who asks follow-up questions about an activity is expressing interest. Be sure to indulge them.

Strong negatives. Pay attention to what they strongly don't want. That's also useful information. Sometimes an emphatic no about one thing clarifies what they actually value.

What you are not listening for: polite enthusiasm designed to please you. Children are often skilled at reading what their parents want and reflecting it back. If your child seems to be agreeing with everything

you suggest, slow down and ask more open-ended questions. Just because your child is competent at an activity does not mean it gives them joy.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *If you could try anything on this list for one day, no commitment, what would it be?*
- *Is there anything on this list you've always been curious about but never tried?*
- *What sounds most fun to you?*
- *Is there anything on this list that a friend does that you've ever thought about trying?*

"Draw up a wide list of activities, choose a few options from it, ask your kid what sounds most fun. Let that be the answer."

ROB PRICE

Step 3: Introduce One Activity at a Time

Once your child has expressed genuine interest in something, even tentative interest, your next move is simple: introduce that one activity. Expect a lot of trial and error during this process.

HOW TO INTRODUCE IT

- Find a beginner-friendly entry point: a trial class, a free session, a camp day, a first practice. The goal is a low-stakes first experience, something your child can walk away from without embarrassment if it doesn't click.
- Give it enough time to actually be evaluated. One session is rarely enough. Most activities take three to five sessions before a child has enough context to know how they feel. The first session is almost always awkward.
- Remove the pressure of commitment. Be explicit with your child: *"We're just trying this. You don't have to love it. You don't have to keep doing it. We're just seeing what it's like."*



Step 4: What to Watch For

While your child is trying an activity, your job is just to observe. Reject the impulse to evaluate or coach. You can ask them to give you feedback about what they do or don't like about the activity as they participate, but typically, the signals you are looking for are small. Children who are genuinely connecting with an activity rarely announce it dramatically. What you see is often subtler.

Signs the activity is resonating:

- They talk about it without being asked.
- They mention specific people, like a coach, an instructor, a teammate, or a friend they made.
- They ask when the next session is.
- They practice or engage with the activity between sessions without being prompted.
- They seem more settled, more energized, or more themselves after attending.
- They are disappointed, not relieved, when a session is cancelled.

Signs the activity is not resonating:

- Consistent reluctance or dread before each session that doesn't improve after the first few weeks.
- A flat, closed affect when you ask about it.
- No sense of connection to the people in the room/on the field.
- Relief when sessions are cancelled.

The distinction that matters most is between **difficulty** and **dislike**. An activity that is hard, that challenges your child, that sometimes makes them frustrated is not the same as an activity they don't want to do. Difficulty is part of how enrichment works. Dislike is a different signal.

At the end of each section, have a simple check-in with your child about the activity. Listen to the answers openly without steering them.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *What part of that activity did you enjoy most?*
- *What felt easy?*
- *What felt difficult but still worth doing?*
- *Was there a moment when you felt completely absorbed?*
- *What did you learn about yourself?*
- *Did that activity leave you feeling energized or tired?*
- *Is there something you'd try differently next time?*
- *Is there something you wish adults understood about why you like—or do not like—this activity?*

Step 5: How to Measure Confidence and Joy

We're trained to measure activities by external outcomes, including rankings, scores, progress reports, and awards. Those things are real, but they are not the primary measure for this exercise.

What you are actually trying to measure is internal. Two things specifically:

Confidence shows up as...

- A willingness to try harder things.
- Less catastrophizing when something goes wrong.
- A growing sense that they are capable — not just at this activity, but generally.
- Reduced avoidance of challenge in other areas of life.
- The ability to recover from a bad session, rehearsal, or a mistake without falling apart.

A child who finishes a season having never won a trophy, nailed a solo, or even mastered a new skill, but who now believes more firmly in their own ability to get back up and try again, is a child who has gained something real and something that will benefit them throughout their life.



Joy shows up as...

- Genuine anticipation before sessions, not just relief that it's over.
- Spontaneous engagement with the activity outside of scheduled time.
- A sense of belonging to the community around the activity.
- Laughter.
- The desire to share their experience with you, whether that includes showing you something or telling you something to bring you into it.

A child can be genuinely joyful in an activity that is also hard, that sometimes frustrates them, that they occasionally struggle with. What distinguishes joy from mere tolerance is that they come back to it by choice.

Whether they want to try the activity again is the most important. And that question deserves a real answer, not a polite one. If the answer is genuinely no, not a reluctant yes, not *I-don't-want-to-disappoint-you*, that is useful information, not failure. Go back to your Wide List and try something else. This is experimentation, not commitment.



A simple check-in to do with your child after each session

Ask the following three questions. Listen to the answers without steering them.

- *What was the best moment for you this session?*
- *Is there anything about it you'd want to change?*
- *Do you want to do this again?*

Step 6: What to Do When Your Child Wants to Quit

They may, at some point, want to quit. Almost every child does. Before you respond, it helps to know which kind of quitting this is. There are two common kinds.

Quitting from avoidance

Leaving because something is hard, uncomfortable, or temporarily unpleasant, and the path of least resistance is to stop. This kind of quitting, if indulged too readily, teaches children that difficulty is a reason to exit. It leaves them slightly less capable of tolerating discomfort the next time.

Quitting from honest self-knowledge

Leaving because a child has genuinely discovered that this particular activity is not for them. Not because it got hard, but because it doesn't fit who they are. That is a different thing entirely and deserves to be honored.

The question is how to tell them apart.

A useful rule of thumb: if a child wants to quit in the first one to two sessions, before they've had enough time to actually evaluate the experience, it's worth encouraging them to continue a little longer before deciding. If they want to quit after a full season or after enough time to know what the activity actually is, that deserves more weight.

When you're trying to understand which kind it is, ask:

- *Is there something specific that happened that made you not want to go?*
- *If that one thing were different, would you still want to quit?*
- *Is it that you don't like this activity, or is it that you don't like how it feels right now?*

There is no universal answer. Some children need a parent who encourages them to stay through the hard part. Some need a parent who trusts them when they say something isn't right. Knowing which your child needs in a given moment is part of the ongoing work of parenting.

It also doesn't always have to be all or nothing. Don't close the door completely on an activity that doesn't resonate when you first try it. For some kids, taking a break gives them time to reflect, and they may find they miss the activity when it's gone. They may also have renewed interest at a different age.

What this guide can do is remind you of one thing: the goal is not just mastery, it's discovery. If your child tries something and learns it's not for them, even if that happens after one season or even just one month, they have learned something real. The Wide List is still wide, meaning there is always another thing to try.

A FINAL NOTE

This exercise is a practice, not a one-time event. It is something you return to as your child grows, as their interests shift, and as new possibilities emerge. A child who is eight years old probably has a different wide list than when they are twelve years old.

Across all of it, the goal is not to find the one right activity and stick with it forever, but to raise a child who has accumulated enough real-world challenge and community experience that they carry it into adulthood as a kind of baseline. It is helping them gather the proof over years of low-stakes effort that they are capable of showing up, getting back up, and belonging somewhere.

That is what real-world childhood builds. This is where it starts.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

What does your child gravitate toward when they have unstructured time? Not what you'd hope they'd choose, but what they actually choose. That pattern is often pointing toward where their wide list should start.

SOMETHING TO TRY:

This week, sit down and build your wide list. Aim for at least fifteen activities across all four domains. Then ask your child from a shortlist of those options: *"If you could try any one of these for just one day, no commitment, what would it be?"*

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

In the first few sessions of any new activity, notice your child when they don't know you're watching. Are they watching the other kids with curiosity? Do they ask the instructor a question without being prompted? Do they seem flat and ready to leave, or reluctant to go when it's time? Those unguarded moments are the most reliable signal you have as to whether it's the right fit.



Module 5: **Be Screen-Smart,** **Not Screen-Free**

Understanding healthy tech use

This Playbook is not anti-technology. We are not asking you to move to a cabin in the woods and cancel your internet service. Nor are we suggesting that screens are inherently dangerous or that every minute spent on a device is a minute wasted.

What we are saying is technology is a tool. And like any tool, what matters is how it's being used, what it's being used for, and what it's being used instead of. A hammer is not good or bad. It depends entirely on what you're building, or what you're breaking.

Technology as Enabler, Not Anesthetic

There is a meaningful difference between using technology to do something and using technology to feel nothing.

When a child uses an app to practice an instrument, they are building something. When a child learns to edit video, code a simple program, or video call a grandparent who lives across the country, they are connecting to the world in ways that have real value. When a teenager researches a topic they're passionate about, watches a tutorial that teaches them something new, or uses technology to create rather than consume, these are generally good uses of a genuinely powerful tool.

This is technology as an enabler. It extends what a child can do, learn, and reach.



The problem is not that version of technology, but the other version: the infinite scroll, the autoplay, the algorithmically curated feed optimized to make the next thing always feel more compelling than stepping away. This is technology as an anesthetic. It is not something a child is doing, but something happening to them. It is the simulation of connection, but not actual connection. It's stimulation that numbs and helps children to dissociate.

One of the most useful things a parent can do is learn to tell the difference and help their children learn to tell the difference too.

Active vs. Passive: The Most Important Distinction You Can Make

Active screen use means your child is doing something: creating, communicating, learning, building. They are the agent and the device is the instrument.

Examples of active screen use:

- Video calling friends or family.
- Using a music learning app to practice between lessons, such as the School of Rock Method App, which bridges rehearsal and reinforces what students are learning in their programs rather than replacing the live, communal experience.
- Creating content with genuine intention, such as filming something, editing photos, or writing something they care about.
- Learning a specific skill they chose to pursue like a language, a craft technique, or a coding concept.
- Collaborating with peers on a shared project or creative endeavor.

Passive screen use means something is happening to your child. The algorithm is in charge. They are consuming content they didn't seek out, responding to notifications they didn't invite, and scrolling without intention or end.

Examples of passive screen use:

- Infinite feed scrolling on any platform.
- Autoplay video watching — where one video ends and another begins automatically.
- Responding to notifications as they arrive, rather than choosing when to engage.
- Consuming content recommended by an algorithm rather than sought out by genuine interest.
- Doom-scrolling through news, social media, or content chosen by a platform's engagement system.

Neither of these categories is perfectly clean, as a child can start with active use and drift into passive. The point is not to police every session, but to give yourself and your child a framework for noticing the difference.



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The question “*Am I using this, or is it using me?*” is one of the most useful digital literacy tools a parent can offer.

The Smartphone Question

Youth Enrichment Brands recommends that children not receive a smartphone until age 16.

This is a position about smartphones specifically, not about screens in general.

A computer is a screen that sits on a desk or a table. It is accessed intentionally, in a specific place, and then left behind. It does not vibrate in your pocket. It does not follow you into the bathroom, to the dinner table, in the car, or into bed. The limitations of its natural form mean you have to go to it, rather than it coming with you everywhere you go.

A smartphone provides no natural breaks from its own pull. Every moment of boredom, transition, or quiet becomes an opportunity for the phone to fill the space, and once it fills that space often enough, boredom, transition, and quiet start to feel intolerable without it. Those moments of apparent emptiness are actually when some of the most important developmental work happens: daydreaming, self-reflection, the gradual learning of how to simply be with yourself.

If your child needs a phone for safety and communication purposes, which many do, a flip phone with calling and texting capability is a reasonable middle ground before 16. It solves the practical problem without introducing the addictive architecture of the smartphone. It is not a social penalty. It is a considered choice in your child's genuine interest.

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

The most sustainable screen boundaries are the ones held by a community, not just a family.

When a child is the only one in their friend group without a smartphone, or the only one not on a particular platform, the social cost is real and should not be dismissed. Children are acutely sensitive to belonging, and telling your child to simply not care what their peers think is developmentally unrealistic.

The more effective approach is to find other parents who share similar values about technology, who are making similar choices for similar reasons, and whose children your child actually knows and spends time with. When a child has friends who are also not on social media before 16, or who also have flip phones, the experience shifts from deprivation to community norm. The burden moves from the individual family to the shared culture.

This takes intentionality. It means having honest conversations with other parents at school, in your programs, and in your neighborhood about what you're trying to do and why. It means being willing to be open about your position and building the culture you want your child to grow up in, rather than waiting for the culture to change on its own.

Youth Enrichment Brands has built spaces for kids where being screen-free is the norm. Our programs are built on real-world interaction, where participation in the activities is only possible without a phone.

Taking Interest Without Taking Over: The Parent's Role in Your Child's Online World

One of the most common mistakes parents make with technology is treating it as either entirely off-limits or entirely unsupervised. Both extremes leave children without what they actually need: a trusted adult who is genuinely curious about their experience.



Self-awareness check-in:

Take as much active interest in your child's online world as you would in what's happening at the party they're attending on Friday night. You wouldn't drop your teenager at a party and assume everything is fine without knowing whose house it is, who else is there, and whether an adult will be present. The online spaces your child inhabits are no different. The question is how to be involved without making your child feel surveilled.

The answer is curiosity. The type of genuine, nonjudgmental curiosity that you'd bring to a conversation about a book they're reading or a friend they've mentioned.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *Who do you follow that you actually look forward to seeing?*
- *What's something you've seen online lately that made you laugh, or you can't stop thinking about?*
- *Is there anything going on in the spaces you hang out in online that feels complicated or hard to navigate?*
- *What do you wish I understood better about how you and your friends actually use [platform or app]?*

These questions do several things at once. They signal that you're interested, not suspicious. They open a door rather than demand entry. They invite your child to share their experience rather than defend their choices. And they give you information you actually need about whether your child is on a platform and what that platform feels like from their point of view.

The goal is to be the person your child comes to when something online feels off rather than monitoring every interaction. That relationship is built in small, curious, nonjudgmental conversations long before there's a crisis rather than in the moment one arrives.

Age-Based Guidance on Screen Time

The following guidance draws on recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics⁷ and the clinical expertise of Erica Komisar. These are invitations, not mandates, as every child and every family is different. But they offer a useful framework for parents who want a starting point.

Under 2

Video calling with family members is the only screen use with demonstrated benefit. All other screen use is best avoided. This is because everything else your child could be doing with that time is more valuable developmentally. The AAP offers the option to introduce only high-quality, educational programming watched together between 18 and 24 months, but we recommend holding off entirely until 2 years.

Ages 2–5

Limit to one hour per day of high-quality, age-appropriate content. Co-view whenever possible because a child who watches with a parent who talks about what they're seeing gets significantly more developmental benefit than one who watches alone. This is also the age when the habits that will shape the next fifteen years are being formed.

Ages 6–12

Introduce consistent limits on recreational screen time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of non-school screen time per day, with clear boundaries around when screens are available (not during meals, not in the hour before bed, not in the bedroom at night). At this age, the distinction between active and passive use becomes increasingly important to teach and reinforce. This is also when real-world group activities are most powerfully habit-forming. A child who is deeply embedded in a sport, an ensemble, or a community program at age ten has something to return to that competes genuinely with screens.

Ages 13–15

The pressure to be on social media intensifies significantly in these years, precisely when the adolescent brain is most vulnerable to its effects. Holding the line on social media and being honest with your teenager about why is harder at this age but more important. Consider limiting usage to a flip phone, group chats via text, and video calls with actual friends. These meet the genuine social needs of early adolescence without the comparison architecture of social media platforms.

Age 16+

This is the age at which we believe social media access, with family conversation and ongoing parental involvement, becomes more appropriate. Not because the risks disappear at 16, but because the developing brain has reached a stage where the capacity for self-regulation, perspective-taking, and critical evaluation of content is meaningfully stronger than it is at 12 or even 15.

⁷ "Screen Time Guidelines." American Academy of Pediatrics, 2025

Online Safety: The Non-Negotiables

We feel that the following guardrails are the baseline from which everything else builds and should not be considered optional.

No identifying personal information in any forum.

Full name, school, location, phone number, and photos that reveal location or routine should never be shared publicly, and children should understand why. This is not paranoia. It is the same common sense that keeps your home address off a public billboard.

Parental oversight of all platforms and communities your child participates in.

This means knowing where your child is online, having access to their accounts, and maintaining a relationship in which your child knows you might look, and understands why. You would apply the same oversight if your child was going to another child's house or hanging out with their friends in a public place. The goal is safety, not surveillance.

No engagement with unknown commenters without parental awareness.

Strangers who comment on a child's content are not automatically dangerous, but they are unknown. The habit of checking in with a parent before engaging with someone they don't know in person protects children from the specific vulnerabilities that online anonymity creates.

Social media minimum age: 16.

This is Youth Enrichment Brands' position, held clearly and for reasons we've explained throughout this Playbook. We encourage you to make your own informed decision and we hope the framework we've offered here makes that decision easier.



A Good Social Media Practice for your kids

Before you post, share, comment, or send anything online, ask yourself two questions:

1. *Would I say this out loud, in person, to someone I respect?*

If the answer is no, (if you wouldn't say it to a teacher, a coach, a grandparent, or a friend you actually care about) don't post it. The distance of a screen makes it easy to say things we wouldn't otherwise say. That distance is an illusion. The words are real.

2. *Am I comfortable with this existing forever?*

Deleted posts are never fully deleted. Screenshots exist. The internet has a longer memory than any of us. Before you share something, ask whether you'd be comfortable with it surfacing five years from now like in a job interview, in a conversation with someone you love, or in a moment when you've grown into a different version of yourself.

Technology and Youth Enrichment Brands Programs: The Right Kind of Bridge

The following reflects how we think about technology in the context of our own programs.

Technology, used well, can extend real-world experience rather than replace it. The School of Rock Method App is a good example: it gives students a way to practice and engage with their instrument between lessons and rehearsals, reinforcing what they're building in a physical room with real bandmates. The app is a bridge back to the program, not a substitute for it.

This is the model we'd encourage families to apply more broadly. Technology that points toward real-world experience, community, and practice is technology in its right relationship. Technology that becomes the destination — the thing itself rather than the path to something — is where the trouble tends to live.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

If you mapped your child's average screen time over the past week and labeled each session as either active or passive, what would the ratio look like?

SOMETHING TO TRY:

This week, pick one meal and make it phone-free for the whole family. Notice what happens in the space that opens up. It's often smaller and more ordinary than you'd expect, and sometimes more valuable than anything that happened online that day.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

Notice how your child behaves in the thirty minutes after putting down a device. How they seem? Do they transition easily into something else, or do they seem unable to find traction in the real world? That transition tells you something worth knowing.



Module 6: Raising a Good Sport

Healthy competition, character, and what to watch out for

Competition gets a bad reputation it does not entirely deserve. The problem is not that children want to win. Wanting to win can summon focus, courage, discipline, and effort. The problem begins when winning starts to feel like proof of who a child is and losing like evidence of who they are not.

When a child's worth rides on every score, ranking, and outcome, competition stops being energizing and starts becoming threatening. Children may cheat, make excuses, quit when they fall behind, or struggle to celebrate someone else's success. They may even win and still feel miserable, fixated on the shot they missed or the teammate who outperformed them. Beneath the unhealthy drive to succeed at all costs is often a deeper hope: If I succeed, will I finally feel worthy?

Healthy competition, on the other hand, offers children something far more valuable. When their worth is secure, they are free to compete wholeheartedly, to take risks, withstand disappointment, respect an opponent, and discover what they are capable of. They can want to win without needing someone else to lose in order to feel good about themselves.

This module is about helping children develop that kind of healthy competitive spirit, one that is ambitious but grounded. The goal is to help children understand what is truly at stake, which is not simply whether they succeed, but who they become in the pursuit.



What Healthy Competition Actually Looks Like

Healthy competition has a few recognizable qualities that distinguish it from its toxic cousin.

A child competing from a healthy place **brings genuine effort regardless of whether they're winning**. They play hard in a blowout loss. They don't coast in an easy win. The effort is for themselves and their team, not for the scoreboard or applause.

A child competing from a healthy place **can lose with their head up**. Not without disappointment, because disappointment is honest and appropriate, but they can shake hands, acknowledge a good performance from the other side, and come back next week. They don't need to assign blame, find an excuse, or catastrophize. Losing is painful, not catastrophic.

A child competing from a healthy place **can celebrate another's success without feeling diminished by it**. This is one of the clearest signals of genuine confidence: the child who is genuinely happy when someone else on their team or in their group does something remarkable, because they understand that their peer's excellence doesn't subtract from their own.

And perhaps most distinctively: a child competing from a healthy place **knows why they're there**. They are not there for the trophy, the praise, or to please a parent watching. They're there because they love the game, the music, the water, or the art. There is something about the activity itself that has become genuinely theirs.

Callout | "The Surfer and the Wave"

A different way to think about competition

In his classic book *The Inner Game of Tennis*, W. Timothy Gallwey describes a way of competing that has nothing to do with beating an opponent.

Think of a surfer waiting for the perfect wave. The surfer isn't out there to beat the wave. The wave doesn't win or lose. The surfer waits, sometimes for a long time, for the right wave not to defeat it, but to test their own capability against it. To find out what they're made of when something genuinely difficult arrives.

That's the spirit of healthy competition. The opponent isn't the enemy and the game isn't a threat. Both are opportunities to discover what you can do when something is at stake.

When you introduce this idea to your child, you might frame it simply: "You're not out there to beat them. You're out there to see what you've got." That shift, from defeating someone to discovering yourself, changes everything about how competition feels.

What to Teach and Model

Children learn the values of competition primarily by watching the adults around them. They notice what parents do on the sideline during a game, swim meet, or band performance, and what they say in the car on the way home or at the dinner table afterward.

It is for this reason that it is important to first look at our own behavior as parents to determine what we may need to adjust to model the healthy attitude towards competition that we want our kids to reflect.

ATTRIBUTES WORTH TEACHING AND MODELING FOR HEALTHY COMPETITION

HONESTY

About how you played, about whether you gave your best, about what you could do better. A child who can be honest about their own performance without catastrophizing or deflecting is building something durable.

PERSISTENCE

The willingness to keep showing up even when improvement is slow or invisible. Persistence is not stubbornness. It is the quiet understanding that effort compounds over time.

KINDNESS

Toward teammates who are struggling or opponents who played well. Kindness in competition is not weakness. It is the mark of a child who is secure enough in their own worth that they don't need to diminish others.

PATIENCE WITH THE PROCESS

The understanding that growth is not linear and that a bad performance does not define a season. The child who stays through difficulty often becomes the player who surprises everyone in the end.

RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES

In skill level, in playing style, in what people can contribute. Understanding that a team or ensemble is a community of different people who each bring something. Teaching a child to see and value that variety is one of the many important lessons competitive environments can offer.

These are human values, practiced on fields and courts and stages and pools, and carried into everything that comes after.



Talking With Your Child About Envy

Envy is a natural and universal human emotion, not a character flaw. What matters is not whether your child feels it, but what they learn to do with it.

A child who watches a teammate score the goal they wanted to score or earn the solo they auditioned for is going to feel something. Pretending otherwise, or shaming them for it, closes the conversation before it starts. The more useful move is to **name it and open a door**.

Callout | Jennifer B. Wallace

In my research on achievement culture, envy surfaced again and again as a form of information. It can reveal what a child longs for, values, or hopes to become. A flash of envy when a peer is praised may tell us how deeply a child wants to improve or be seen. We can help children turn that feeling into self-knowledge by asking: “What is this envy pointing toward? What matters to you here? What might you want to work toward?” The most resilient children I’ve met have sturdy adults who are willing to meet uncomfortable emotions with curiosity, talk about them openly, and resist the urge to judge or try to make the feeling disappear immediately.



CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR KIDS AT DIFFERENT AGES

For younger children (ages 6–10):

- Sometimes when someone else gets something we wanted, it can feel yucky inside. Has that ever happened to you? What does it feel like?
- It's okay to wish you had what they have. What do you think you could do to get better at that too?

For older children and teens (ages 11+):

- It's totally normal to feel bothered when someone else gets something you were hoping for. I feel that way sometimes too. What did that feel like for you?
- Do you think what they did to earn it is something you could work toward? What would that look like?

- *Is there anything about how you're feeling that's telling you something useful, like about what you actually want or what matters to you?*

The goal of these conversations is not to eliminate the feeling, but to help the child recognize it and develop the habit of turning those uncomfortable emotions toward growth rather than away from it.

Collaborative Competitiveness: Being a Great Teammate Is Its Own Achievement

We introduced **collaborative competitiveness** in [Module 3](#), which is the idea that personal accomplishments and contributions to others are not in competition with each other, and that the satisfaction of watching someone else thrive because of your help is one of the most durable forms of competitive joy.

In practice, it sounds like this: *"It's great to be the best player on your team. It's even better to make your team better."* Watch for the moments when your child does this and name it when you see it. *"I noticed what you did for your teammate today. That's the part I'm most proud of."* That observation, delivered specifically and sincerely, is more powerful than any trophy.



Don't Dismiss Cheating

Children cheat. It happens. And when it does, the instinct of many parents is either to minimize it (*"it's not a big deal, it's just a game"*) or to respond with punishment that addresses the behavior without addressing what's underneath it. Neither response gets to the root of what matters.

When a child cheats, it is almost always a sign that the stakes in their mind have become too high. That somewhere along the way they have absorbed the message that the outcome matters more than how they got there. That they must win at all costs or they will be less, and that their worth in this moment depends on the result.

Cheating is not a discipline problem. It's an emotional distress signal.

It can also be modeled by parents. It is a moment to check in with yourself as parents to understand if you have inadvertently modeled cheating behaviors, whether at board games, when you compete in sports, or in business or your professional field.



Callout | Erica Komisar

In my clinical practice, cheating is one of the clearest early warning signs I watch for. A child who cheats is not, in most cases, a child with a character defect. They are a child who has come to believe, however that belief was formed, that they are not enough as they are, and that the only way to matter is to win. That belief is painful to carry, but it is also correctable. Punishment alone does not correct the issue, as that only addresses the behavior without touching the underlying belief. Connection and helping a child experience unconditional regard from the adults in their lives is key to their sense of worth no longer being entirely contingent on outcomes. A child who knows they are loved regardless of the score does not need to cheat. The cheating is the symptom. The message that love is conditional on performance is the cause. When I see cheating, I ask parents: what message, however unintentionally, might your child be receiving about what it takes to be valued in this family?



Self-awareness check-in:

Have you ever caught yourself starting a sentence with something similar to *"This will be great for your college essay,"* when your child is under 17?

That sentence, even said with love and the best intentions, carries a message your child hears clearly: what you're doing matters primarily because of how it appears to others and what it might produce later. The activity becomes instrumental and a means to an end.

This doesn't make you a bad parent. It makes you a parent living in a culture that has made it easy to think this way. But it's worth noticing. The antidote is not to stop caring about your child's future. It's to let the activity be its own reward and to cheer for the effort, the growth, the joy, and the character, and trust that those things will produce a future worth being proud of.

When you discover your child has cheated, the most useful first response is curiosity rather than correction. *"Tell me what was going on for you."* Not as a strategy for softening a consequence, but as a genuine attempt to understand what the behavior was signaling.

The conversation that follows is one of the most important ones you can have. Because what you're really doing is helping your child understand that their worth is not tied to the performance. That you are proud of who they are, not just what they do, and that how they compete matters more to you than whether they win. That message, delivered consistently and with love, is what makes cheating unnecessary.

Red Flags and Green Flags

The following behaviors are not definitive. Every child is different, and a single observation in either direction is not a verdict, but patterns over time are worth paying attention to.



Signs your child is competing from a healthy place

- Congratulates opponents sincerely after a loss.
- Acknowledges when the other team or player played well.
- Keeps effort consistent regardless of the score.
- Expresses disappointment without catastrophizing.
- Talks about teammates, bandmates, or classmates with warmth and investment in their success.
- Comes back the following week without being dragged.
- Seems energized, not depleted, by the experience of competition.
- Identifies something they want to get better at; is genuinely interested in the work.



Signs worth a closer look

- Refuses to acknowledge good performances by opponents.
- Blames others or conditions after every loss.
- Effort visibly drops when the outcome seems determined.
- Expresses relief, not disappointment, when events are cancelled.
- Shows consistent anxiety before competitions and performances that doesn't ease after starting.
- Has been dishonest about scores, rules, or their own performance.
- Describes their worth in terms of ranking or outcome exclusively.
- Seems to be competing to relieve parental anxiety rather than for their own reasons.

None of the red flags above are urgent in isolation. All of them, sustained over time and across multiple contexts, are worth a conversation with your child, and possibly with a coach or instructor who knows them.

How Youth Enrichment Brands Approaches Competition

The values that Youth Enrichment Brands is built on are not abstract. They show up in specific moments on specific days in programs across the country, and internationally. And they map almost exactly onto what healthy competition requires.

VALUES IN PRACTICE

The following values are operationalized throughout Youth Enrichment Brands programs.

SAFETY

Physical and emotional. A child who feels safe in their competitive environment can take risks, make mistakes, and try again.

BELONGING

The knowledge that you are part of something, regardless of whether you're the best on the team. Participation is guaranteed, not earned by performance. Belonging is the precondition for performance.

CONNECTION

To teammates, to classmates, to coaches, to instructors, to the community of the program. Connection is what makes competition worthwhile, and what remains long after the season ends.

A child who learns to belong before they've proven themselves, to stay curious after a mistake, to persist when nothing is going well, and to feel genuinely connected to the people around them has gained something that no ranking captures. That is what our programs are built to produce. And it is, not coincidentally, exactly what healthy competition has always been able to give.

PERSISTENCE

The quality that shows up not when everything is going well, but when it isn't. The child who stays through difficulty is the child who discovers what they're actually made of.

CURIOSITY

The willingness to ask 'What can I learn from this?' after a mistake, a win, or a moment when a peer did something you didn't understand. Curiosity keeps competition alive and meaningful.





3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Think about the last time your child competed in something, whether it was a game, a performance, a tryout, or a test. What was the first thing you said to them afterward? Was it about the outcome, or about them?

SOMETHING TO TRY:

Next time your child performs, make a commitment to yourself: the first thing you say in the car afterward will have nothing to do with the outcome. Try *"What was the best moment for you today?"* or *"I loved watching you out there."* Then follow their lead.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

Notice whether your child seems to compete differently when you're watching versus when you're not. A child who plays more freely when the parent isn't in the audience is useful information about what kind of presence they need from you.



Module 7: **How to Praise** **Your Child**

The difference between conditional and unconditional acceptance

Think about the last time your child did something well. When they scored a goal, aced a test, nailed a performance, hit a perfect drive, or earned a compliment from a coach or teacher. What did you say to them?

Now think about the last time your child did something they were genuinely proud of. Something that required courage, patience, honesty, or kindness. Something that had no measurable outcome attached to it. Did you notice? Did you say anything?

If there is a gap between those two moments, it is worth paying attention to. Because children are listening to both what we celebrate and what we let pass in silence. And over time, they build a picture of what we actually value from the pattern of what gets our attention.

This module is about closing that gap.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE

You don't have to choose between celebrating their results and building their character. You can do both.

A child who scores the winning goal deserves to hear that you're proud of them. A child who plays a beautiful concert deserves to know you were moved. A child who works hard for years and achieves something genuinely difficult deserves to have that achievement acknowledged with real enthusiasm.

None of this is in question. Results matter. Achievement is real. The work of getting good at something is genuinely admirable, and children should hear that.

What this module is about is what is emphasized most, as in what your child hears more often, more consistently, and what they internalize as the primary basis of your pride in them.

The research, as Jennifer B. Wallace outlines in her book *Never Enough*, tells us clearly that children who feel valued primarily for what they produce are more anxious, more fragile, and ultimately less motivated than children who feel valued for who they are. The stakes of getting this right are not small.

Callout | Erica Komisar

There is a clinically significant difference between admiring a child for who they are and admiring them for what they achieve. Children who receive most of their praise and attention in response to performance like grades, athletic achievement, winning, and accolades, learn a very specific and damaging lesson: that love is conditional and that they are most valuable when they produce. This creates children who are not more motivated by high expectations, as parents often hope, but more anxious, more perfectionistic, and paradoxically more fragile when they fail because failure threatens not just the result, but the relationship itself. The child who knows they are admired for their character — for their honesty, their kindness, their persistence, their courage — does not have this fear. They can fail at a task without fearing they have failed as a person. It is the foundation from which genuine ambition and resilience grow.



What Character-Building Praise Actually Sounds Like

Character-building praise is specific, honest, and focused on who your child is or how they behaved, not what they achieved.

It sounds like:

- *I loved how honest you were in that match. You could have let that go, and nobody would have known. But you called it on yourself.*
- *The way you stayed patient with your bandmate when they were struggling to find the rhythm — that was impressive. I could see it wasn't easy.*
- *I could see how hard you worked even when it wasn't going your way. You didn't give up. That's the part I'm most proud of.*
- *I noticed today that you kept encouraging the people around you even when you were frustrated. That's real leadership.*
- *You were kind to that kid who was having a hard time. I saw it. I want you to know I saw it.*

Notice what these statements have in common.

1. They are specific — not "great job" or "I'm so proud of you," which are warm but vague. They name something observable that the child actually did.
2. They connect the praise to a quality of character like honesty, patience, persistence, generosity, or leadership, rather than to an outcome.
3. They communicate something important: ***I am watching you, not just your performance. I see who you actually are. And what I see makes me proud.***

That last piece, about being seen, is one of the most powerful things a parent can offer a child. That they are not just seen when they win, but for who they are.

Unconditional Love & Acceptance | Jennifer B. Wallace

Unconditional love and acceptance are among the clearest ways we communicate to a child that they matter. It says nothing you achieve can make you more worthy of my love, and nothing you fail at can make you less worthy. When children feel a parent's warmth, attention, or delight rise and fall with their performance, achievement becomes a way to secure the relationship. The child begins to wonder: What do I have to do to keep you proud of me? They may work hard and appear highly motivated, but underneath that effort is the exhausting fear that love and approval must continually be earned. That bargain fuels so much perfectionism, anxiety, and burnout in high-achieving young people.

To be clear, unconditional love and acceptance do not require us to lower expectations. Children benefit from challenge and our belief in what they can become. But those expectations need to rest on an unshakable foundation: I care about how you behave and how hard you try. I may be disappointed by a choice you make, but my love for you is never in question.

Children need to feel this unconditional love and acceptance most clearly when they fail or fall short. In those moments, our love and attention communicate to a child that they are not their failures, just as they are not their successes. Their worth never wavers. A child who knows that is free to take risks, recover from failure, and pursue achievement with a sense of purpose rather than out of fear.

The Difference Between Presence and Pressure

There is a version of parental involvement at games, performances, and competitions that is a gift. And there is a version that is a burden. Children feel both, often simultaneously, and they rarely have the words to tell you which one they're experiencing.

The gift version looks like this: a parent who shows up, pays attention, and communicates clearly through their posture, their reactions, and their words after, that they are there for their child's experience and

not their own. A parent whose face, when they catch their child's eye across the field or from the front row of the audience, says, **'I see you, and I'm glad to be here.'** Not **'don't mess up.'** Just: **'I see you.'**

The burden version is subtler and harder to recognize in yourself. It looks like a parent whose anxiety is visible from the sideline, whose comments during and after are focused on what went wrong and what could be done better, or who processes their own emotional investment in the outcome in ways their child can feel. The presence of these parents raise the stakes rather than lowering them.

Most parents move between both versions, often within the same game. That's just being human. But it's worth asking honestly which version your child experiences more often.

THE i9 SPORTS PARENT CODE OF CONDUCT

The **i9 Sports Parent Code of Conduct** is one of the clearest articulations we know of what the gift version looks like in practice. Every parent in the i9 Sports network is asked to:

- Cheer for effort, not just outcomes
- Support all players on both teams, not just their own child
- Let the coaches coach and resist the urge to instruct from the sideline
- Model the sportsmanship you want your child to develop

Behind these commitments is a simple principle: **a parent's job at a practice or performance is to let the child own the experience.** They aren't there to manage it, optimize it, or live it vicariously, but to witness it with warmth, genuine interest, and the clear and consistent message that whatever happens, you are proud of who they are. That message, delivered reliably over years, is the thing that stays.



Self-awareness check-in:

After your child's last game, performance, competition, or class, what was the first thing you said to them?

Was it about the result? The score, the outcome, who won, what went wrong, what could have been better?

Or was it about them? How they seemed, what you noticed, what made you proud that had nothing to do with the scoreboard?

There is no right answer, only the honest one; and the question of whether it's the answer you'd choose if you were thinking clearly, with your child's long-term wellbeing fully in view.

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR CHILD AND THE OTHER ADULTS IN THEIR LIFE

One of the most important and underappreciated aspects of raising a confident, resilient child is something that rarely shows up in parenting books: protecting the relationships your child has with the other trusted adults in their life, like coaches, instructors, teachers, and mentors.



Children need more than their parents. They need adults who see them in different contexts, who challenge them in different ways, and who offer a kind of feedback that parents, however loving and present, simply cannot provide. This could be a coach who knows your child's name, an instructor who notices when something is off, or a mentor who offers a model of what it looks like to be good at something your child cares about. These relationships are developmental infrastructure. They are one of the primary ways children build identity and confidence outside the family.

This means that when something goes wrong, whether it's a disagreement about playing time, a comment from an instructor that stings, or a moment when you feel your child was treated unfairly, how you handle it matters enormously.

The guidance here is simple, though not always easy to follow.

If you have a concern about how your child is being treated by a coach, instructor, or other trusted adult in their life, address it directly with that adult without your child present. A conversation between adults, handled with respect and a genuine desire to understand, almost always produces better outcomes than a confrontation witnessed by your child.

When a child watches a parent challenge a teacher's authority publicly, or overhears a parent expressing contempt for them, they receive a message that undermines one of the most valuable things that program can offer them: a trusted adult who is not their parent. Children who respect and trust the other adults in their lives have a richer, safer, more expansive world to grow up in. Parents who protect those relationships are giving their children a gift that extends well beyond any single season.

What your child needs to know and feel

You are firmly in their corner, and that they also belong to a community of people beyond your family who believe in them. Both things can be true. They are not in competition. And the parent who models how to



navigate disagreement with grace by showing a child that you can have a concern and address it respectfully, without burning trust, is teaching a durable lesson.

If a situation genuinely warrants intervention and your child's safety, dignity, or wellbeing is at stake — act. That is a different situation, and the guidance above does not apply. Trust your instincts when something is seriously wrong.

Getting a PhD in Your Child | Jennifer B. Wallace

One of the most important jobs of parenting is becoming a careful student of the particular child in front of you: their unique combination of strengths, sensitivities, fears, enthusiasms, and rhythms. In practice, this means learning to separate the future you imagine for your child from the child who is revealing themselves to you now.

Your hopes matter. You may picture the activities they will love, the qualities they will develop, or the life in which they will thrive. Those hopes usually come from a place of deep love. They can also become so loud that they drown out your child's signals.

Those signals are often found in what makes their eyes brighten, what they dread, what they talk about without prompting, and what they choose when no one is directing them. Notice when they seem deeply engaged and when they are performing enthusiasm because they know it will please you.

A parent with a PhD in their child learns to read the child's body language, silences, and enthusiasm. You earn this degree slowly. The coursework happens in the ordinary minutes during car rides, around the dinner table, and at bedtime. The more children feel that our attention is rooted in genuine curiosity, the more of themselves they entrust to us. They can sense the difference between being observed for clues about who they should become and being deeply known for who they already are.

The irony is that the more you practice this kind of attentive, low-pressure attention, the more your child shares with you. Children open up to parents who seem genuinely interested in what they find, not in what they're hoping to find.





A Practical Guide to Character-Building Praise

The following is a set of prompts to help you build new habits gradually.

After a game, performance, class, or competition:

Before you say anything evaluative, try one genuinely curious question. *"What was the best moment for you today?"* Then listen, not for information you can assess, but for what actually mattered to them. You may be surprised by what they say.

When you catch them being good:

Name it immediately and specifically. *"I just watched you do something kind. You probably didn't think I noticed, but I did."* The specificity is what makes it land. Generic praise is easy to dismiss. Specific observation feels like being seen.

When they fail or fall short:

Resist the urge to fix, reframe, or silver-line immediately. Let the disappointment be real for a moment. Then ask: *"How are you feeling about it?"* and follow their lead. The parent who can sit with their child in disappointment without rushing to make it better is one of the most powerful sources of resilience a child can have.

When you want to talk about improvement:

Separate the conversation from the emotion of the moment. The car ride home immediately after a hard loss is not the time. The next morning, when the dust has settled, is better. Begin from a place of shared investment and ask whether they want to hear it before you say it: *"Can I share something I noticed? I think it might help."*

When achievement happens:

Celebrate it fully. And then, somewhere in the celebration, make sure you also name what got them there — the work, the persistence, the courage to keep trying. *"That result is real, and you should feel proud."*

3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

If you asked your child to describe the things that make you most proud of them, what would they say? Is it the answer you'd want them to give?

SOMETHING TO TRY:

This week, find one moment per day to offer your child a specific piece of character-based praise; something you noticed about who they were, not what they achieved. Do this for seven days without mentioning grades, scores, or outcomes, and see what shifts.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

Notice how your child receives character-based praise versus outcome-based praise. Some children who have been praised primarily for results are initially suspicious of character-based praise and don't quite know what to do with it. That unfamiliarity, if it exists, is itself useful information. It tells you something about what they've learned to expect and where to focus next.





Module 8:

Family Challenges

Low-lift actions families can start this week

This module is a collection of concrete, specific challenges that your family can try this week, this month, or this season to begin reclaiming real-world childhood. None of them require a complete overhaul of your family's life. They are all designed to create a small opening, from a shift in habit, a new conversation, or a moment that wouldn't have happened otherwise, and see what grows from it.

You don't have to do all of them or do them in order. Pick the one that feels most relevant to where your family is right now, and start there. The goal is motion, not perfection.

THE DEVICE BASKET

What it is

A physical basket, bowl, or box near the front door or on the kitchen counter where phones, tablets, and laptops go when the family is doing something together. This could be during homework, meals, family activities, or evening wind-down. The basket is for everyone, including parents.

Why it works

The most effective screen boundaries are the ones that are structural rather than willpower-based. Telling yourself not to check your phone is harder than putting your phone somewhere you can't easily reach it. The basket makes the boundary physical and visible, and it makes it apply equally to everyone in the household, which is the part that matters most.

The important part

This challenge only works if parents participate fully. Children don't follow rules about screen use. They follow models. A parent who puts their own technological devices in the basket without being asked sends a more powerful message about the value of presence than any instruction ever could.

Try it for one week at mealtimes and see what conversations happen that wouldn't have otherwise.



Parent Tip: Recreate a landline with your smartphone or get an actual landline

- Make a focus mode called “Landline” that only allows phone calls
- Attach ‘pockets’ to the wall where you can hang up your phone while you are in your house

NO DEVICES IN PRIVATE SPACES

What it is

A household rule that devices, including phones, tablets, and laptops used for non-school purposes, live in common areas such as the kitchen or living room. But they are not permitted in bedrooms, bathrooms, or other private spaces where their use is invisible.

Why it works

The research on sleep alone makes this worth doing: screens in bedrooms are one of the strongest predictors of disrupted sleep in children and adolescents, and disrupted sleep is one of the strongest predictors of anxiety, poor concentration, and emotional dysregulation.^{15 16} But beyond sleep, devices in private spaces create a hidden online world that is difficult for parents to have any meaningful awareness of because invisibility makes the online environment more powerful and parental involvement less possible.

Common areas keep device use visible without making it a surveillance exercise. It normalizes the idea that what happens online is not a secret, separate life, but a part of the life the family shares.

Start with one room. The bedroom at night is the highest-impact place to begin. Get your child a real alarm clock so they don't have to use their phones as an alarm.

SCREEN-FREE DAY

What it is

One day a week, like Saturday or Sunday, when screens are off for everyone. Not just the kids. Everyone.

Why it works

Children are remarkably sensitive to the gap between what they're told and what they observe. A Screen-Free Saturday or Sunday that applies only to children is a lesson in power, not values. A Screen-Free Saturday or Sunday that applies to the whole family is a lesson in what actually matters. The first screen-free day is often the hardest. The second is easier. By the third or fourth, many families find that it becomes the day they look forward to most because the space that opens up when they're gone turns out to be full of things the family forgot they enjoyed.



A challenge within the challenge

Before your first Screen-Free Saturday or Sunday, sit down together as a family and make a list of five things you could do that day that don't involve a screen. Put the list somewhere visible. When the day arrives and someone says "I'm bored," point to the list.

Boredom, it turns out, is often the doorway to something better.

15 Nagata, Jason M., et al. "Bedtime Screen Use Behaviors and Sleep Outcomes in Early Adolescents: A Prospective Cohort Study." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 75, no. 4, Oct. 2024.

16 Bourke, Matthew, et al. "Within-Person Association Between Daily Screen Use and Sleep in Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *JAMA Pediatrics*, Mar. 2026.

THE WIFI OR DATA USAGE CURFEW

What it is

A set time each evening when the household WiFi turns off or when devices are put away until morning. For many families with younger children, 9pm is a reasonable starting point. Adjust for your children's ages and your family's schedule.

Why it works

The hour before sleep is one of the most important hours of the day for brain development in children and adolescents. It's when the brain consolidates memory, regulates emotion, and prepares for the restorative work of sleep. It is also the hour when screens, particularly social media, are most likely to be in use, and when their effects on sleep quality are most pronounced.

A WiFi/Data usage curfew removes the decision entirely. Nobody has to choose to put down their phone because the phone simply stops working. This is technology used wisely: structural boundaries that make the right choice the easy choice.

For families with teenagers who may resist: frame it as a household rule that applies to parents too. When everyone loses WiFi at 9pm or with teens a bit later because of an increased load of academic work, it stops being a punishment and starts being a shared rhythm.



Parent Tip: There are carrier-specific family apps and 3rd party apps as well as device-level controls that allow parents to set restrictions and turn off cell service during certain times of the day or night.

THE ACTIVITY EXPERIMENT

What it is

As a family, choose one activity from the Activity Finder in [Module 4](#) that nobody has tried before. Sign up for a trial class, a first session, or a beginner-friendly entry point. Try it once together before deciding whether to continue.

Why it works

The barrier to trying a new activity is almost always higher in anticipation than in reality. Children who say they don't want to try something new have often simply never been in a room where that thing was happening. A first session, especially tried with others, can change this block entirely. Because suddenly it's a real thing with real people and not an abstract concept they can dismiss.

The key is holding this lightly. The Activity Experiment is not a commitment, it's just one try. "We're just

going to see what it's like." If it resonates, you'll know. If it doesn't, cross it off the list and try something else.

Bring genuine curiosity rather than evaluation to the first session. Your child will take their emotional cues from you.

ACCEPT YOUR CHILD'S CHOICES AND LIMITATIONS

What it is

Less of a challenge than a reminder, but worth naming because it's easy to forget in the middle of all this.

When your child expresses a preference, a disinterest, or a limitation around activities, the most productive response is usually to listen rather than redirect. If they try something and it doesn't fit, let it not fit. If they have a genuine limitation, whether it's physical, temperamental, or situational, honor it rather than frame it as something to overcome.

The important thing to remember

The activity finder exercise is about your child's life, not yours. Their enthusiasm is the compass, but their discomfort is data. Their "no" is worth taking seriously.

This is not about lowering expectations. It's about making sure the expectations are actually theirs.



ONE NEW THING

What it is

This month, introduce your child to one group activity that sits outside their current comfort zone, whether it's something they haven't tried, something slightly unfamiliar, or something that puts them in a room with people they don't already know.

Why it works

Comfort zones are not fixed. They expand through exposure. A child who tries one new thing, even imperfectly or reluctantly, learns something important about their own capacity to navigate unfamiliarity and that lesson compounds. The child who has tried one new thing is more likely to try the next new thing than the child who has never tried any.

The activity doesn't have to be a perfect fit. The point is the trying, not the outcome.

Again, frame it as an experiment, not a commitment. "Let's just see what it's like" removes most of the resistance.

CREATE SOMETHING

What it is

Make something together, offline. Cook a meal from scratch. Build something with your hands. Draw or paint something. Play music. Write a story together. Plant something in the ground.

Why it works

Creation is one of the most powerful antidotes to passive consumption available to families. When you make something, by beginning with nothing and ending with something that exists because of your effort, you experience a quality of satisfaction that no amount of content consumption can replicate. Children who create regularly develop a different relationship with their own capacity than children who primarily consume.

The thing you make doesn't have to be good. The bar is intentionally low here. A batch of cookies counts. A cardboard fort counts. The point is making, not mastery.

SHOW ME SOMETHING

What it is

Once a week, invite your child to show you one thing they love online. It could be a video, a creator they follow, a community they're part of, or a joke that made them laugh. Observe without judgment. Your only job is to be genuinely curious.

Why it works

This challenge is about the relationship, not content moderation. When a parent asks a child to share something they love online with genuine interest rather than suspicious scrutiny, they accomplish something important: they become someone their child trusts with their online world. That trust is the foundation from which every useful conversation about online safety, digital wellbeing, and hard situations will eventually grow.

You don't have to love what they show you or pretend to understand it. You just have to be interested in the fact that they love it.

Try: "Tell me why you like this." Then actually listen to the answer.

CHARACTER PRAISE DAY

What it is

For one full day, commit to praising only character traits rather than results, performance, or achievement. Every piece of praise you offer your child that day will be about who they are, not what they did.

Why it works

Most parents discover, on Character Praise Day, that they have to pay attention differently. Results are easy to notice because they're visible and measurable but character is subtler. It requires watching for the

moments when your child was patient, honest, kind, persistent, or generous.

The exercise trains a new kind of attention and children notice it. Many parents report that their child seems puzzled at first because they are uncertain about what to do with praise that isn't attached to an outcome. But then they become quietly pleased in a way that's different from how they respond to achievement-based praise.

Notice how your child responds differently. That difference is the point.



GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY

What it is

As a family, find one need in your neighborhood, school, or community and meet it — together. Volunteer at a food pantry. Help an elderly neighbor with something they can't do alone. Participate in a local cleanup. Support a cause someone in your family cares about with time, a skill, or resources.

Why it works

Children who feel they add value to the world around them are more resilient than children who feel only that they receive it. This is the second half of Jennifer B. Wallace's mattering formula, not just feeling valued, but having opportunities to add value. The experience of being needed, of contributing something real to someone who feels it, is one of the most powerful builders of genuine self-worth available to a young person.

It is also, importantly, an experience that cannot be replicated online. A like on a post is not the same as watching someone's face when you help them with something real.

Ways to think about what your family can offer

- **Time:** showing up and being present for something that needs people
- **Talent:** a skill your family has that someone else needs
- **Treasure:** resources, however modest, directed toward a genuine need

Start by asking your child: "Is there anything in our neighborhood or school that you think needs more help?" Let them lead the identification of the need. The investment in doing something about it will be higher if the cause is theirs.

THE 30-DAY TRACKER [TEAR OUT ON NEXT PAGE]

What it is

A simple checklist you can print out and put somewhere visible like the refrigerator door, a bulletin board, or the kitchen table, to log real-world activities against screen time over thirty days.

How to use it

Each day has checkboxes for real-world activities: physical, artistic, intellectual, social-emotional and a blank field to input total screen time hours. No judgment or scoring here, just visibility.

Why it works

What gets measured, in a gentle and non-punitive way, gets noticed. The 30-Day Tracker is not a report card. It's a mirror to see the actual shape of your family's days over time, so that the adjustments you want to make are grounded in what's really happening rather than what you imagine is happening.

Many families are surprised by what they see. Some discover that their children are getting more real-world activity than they thought. Others discover the opposite. Both are useful to know.



Conversation Starter Cards

Keep these somewhere accessible like the car, the dinner table, a pocket. Real conversations often start in ordinary moments.

For younger children

- *What's something you're getting better at that you didn't know how to do before?*
- *Who made you feel good today, and what did they do?*
- *If you could add one thing to our family's week, what would it be?*

For older children and teens

- *Who on your team or in your group do you think needs more support right now?*
- *What's something you've done recently that you're actually proud of — not because someone told you to be, but because you felt it yourself?*
- *Is there anything going on that feels complicated that you haven't told me about yet?*
- *What's something you think I don't fully understand about your life right now?*

These questions work best when they're asked with genuine curiosity and no particular agenda. The goal is connection, not information extraction. If your child gives a short answer, that's fine. The door is open. They know it.

30-DAY TRACKER



START DATE: _____ END DATE: _____

Each day, check the domains your child was active in and note screen time hours.
This is not for scoring, just for visibility.

Physical

Artistic

Intellectual

Social-Emotional

1 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	2 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	3 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	4 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	5 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	6 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	7 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____
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29 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____	30 Physical Artistic Intellectual Social Screen hours = _____					

End-of-month reflection

- What activity did your child talk about most?
- Which domain was most underrepresented? What could change?
- What's one thing you want to try differently next month?

A FINAL NOTE ON ALL OF THESE

The challenges in this module are invitations, not assignments. Some will fit your family immediately. Some will take a few tries. Some won't fit at all, and that's fine. Different families are in different places, and a challenge that's wrong for where you are right now might be exactly right in six months.

The only thing that matters is that you start somewhere. Pick one. Start this week. See what happens.

Real-world childhood isn't built in a single Screen-Free Saturday or Sunday or a Character Praise Day or a batch of cookies made together during an afternoon. It's built in the accumulation of those moments. In the pattern they establish, in the habits they form, in the message they send to your child over time about what your family values and where your attention goes.

These are simply a way of making those decisions with a little more intention and a little more company.



3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Of all the challenges in this module, which one made you feel the most resistance?
Resistance is often a useful signal that points toward something worth examining rather than avoiding.

SOMETHING TO TRY:

Share this list with your child and ask them to pick one challenge they want to try together. Let their choice be the starting point. You might be surprised by what they choose.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

In the moments created by these challenges, whether it's the Screen-Free Sunday, the meal without phones, or the thing made together, notice what your child brings to the space. What conversation do they start or thing do they make? What is the version of themselves that shows up when screens aren't filling the room? That version is always there, it just sometimes needs a little more room to breathe.



Module 9: For Parents Who Want to Go Deeper

Curated resources

What follows is a curated set of resources including books, tools, research, and programs that we believe are genuinely worth your time. We've resisted the urge to make this list exhaustive, because an overwhelming list of resources is not helpful. Everything here is here because it earns its place.

The Companion Webinar Series

The Generation Real Project expert advisors, Erica Komisar and Jennifer Breheny Wallace, are available to all families in the Youth Enrichment Brands network through a series of expert-led webinars. These live sessions will go deeper on the topics covered in this Playbook, with time for real questions from real parents.



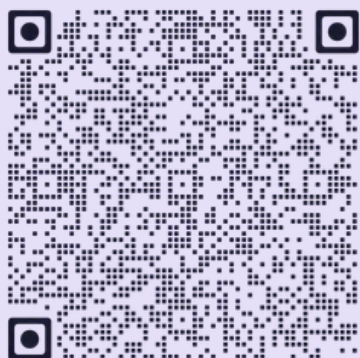
Erica Komisar, psychoanalyst, parenting expert, and author of *Being There* and *Chicken Little: The Sky Isn't Falling*, brings decades of clinical expertise in childhood emotional development, attachment, and the consequences of modern screen culture.

ericakomisar.com



Jennifer B. Wallace, award-winning journalist and author of *Never Enough* and *Mattering*, stresses that kids knowing they are valued for who they are, not just for what they achieve, is a key driver of their well-being.

jenniferbwallace.com



Scan for more details on upcoming webinars, including the topics, schedule, registration information sessions, and access to recordings of previous conversations.

Books Worth Reading

The Generation Real Essential Reading List by Rob Price, Erica Komisar, and Jennifer B. Wallace is a curated reading list of eight books organized around what your family may be facing right now: screens, confidence, achievement pressure, and connection. You don't have to read them all: read a chapter, start a conversation, try one small change. It's a standalone resource with full synopses and personal recommendations for each title.

Download a copy at generationrealproject.com/#reading-list



BOOKS WE THINK EVERY PARENT SHOULD READ
A recommended reading list for parents from the **Generation Real Project**

✓ How to use this list
Start with the book that speaks to where your family is right now. Each book stands alone. You don't need to read them in any order.



When you're worried about screens 📱



The Anxious Generation
Jonathan Haidt
How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illnesses and what we can do about it.
Rob's note: This book gives the clearest picture of what we are actually fighting.



Chicken Little the Sky Isn't Falling
Erica Komisar, LCSW
A practical guide to raising resilient teens in an anxious world.
Rob's note: Resilience isn't about toughening kids up. It's about showing up differently.

When you want to build confidence ☆



Free-Range Kids
Lenore Skenazy
Why giving kids the freedom to explore, make mistakes, and be independent is good for them — and for us all.
Erica's note: Children develop confidence by doing things on their own. Let them.

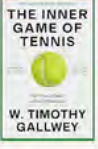


Untangled
Lisa Damour, Ph.D.
Guiding teenage girls through the seven transitions into adulthood.
Jennifer's note: A compassionate roadmap for the teenage years written with so much heart.

When achievement feels overwhelming 🏆



Never Enough
Jennifer Breheny Wallace
Why achievement culture is harming our kids and how to raise them to know their worth.
Rob's note: Mastering, feeling valued for who you are, is the foundation kids need to thrive.



The Inner Game of Tennis
W. Timothy Gallwey
A classic on focus, self-awareness, and performing without pressure.
Jennifer's note: Timeless wisdom that applies far beyond the tennis court.

When your family needs more connection ❤️



Together
Dr. Vivek Murthy, MD
A powerful case for why connection is the key to healthier, happier lives.
Rob's note: Loneliness is a public health crisis. Connection is the cure.



Brainstorm
Daniel J. Siegel, MD
The power and purpose of the teen brain and how to help it thrive.
Erica's note: Understanding the teenage brain helps us parent with more empathy.

These books have been selected as recommended reading for the Generation Real Project by:

Rob Price, CEO of Youth Enrichment Brands
Erica Komisar, LCSW
Jennifer Breheny Wallace

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You don't have to read them all.

- Read a chapter.
- Start a conversation.
- Try one small change.

Tools Worth Bookmarking

Common Sense Media

commonsensemedia.org

The most comprehensive and reliably independent resource available for parents navigating media and technology decisions. Common Sense Media reviews apps, games, movies, television, books, and podcasts with age-specific guidance — not based on content alone but on developmental appropriateness. If you're trying to figure out whether a particular platform, app, or piece of content is right for your child at their specific age, this is the place to start.

Particularly useful features:

- Age-by-age media guides
- Platform-specific privacy and safety reviews
- Guides to talking with kids about specific topics in media and technology
- Ratings that account for educational value, positive messaging, and social modeling

Family Media Plan - American Academy of Pediatrics

healthychildren.org/mediauseplan

The AAP's Family Media Plan is a free, customizable tool that helps families create personalized screen time guidelines based on their children's ages, developmental stages, and family values. It generates a written plan you can refer back to — and revisit as your children grow and circumstances change. Particularly useful because it treats media use as one part of a child's overall health, not as an isolated behavior to police. It considers sleep, physical activity, face-to-face interaction, and academic needs alongside screen time, which is exactly the framework this Playbook is built around.

Let Grow Community Toolkit

letgrow.org/community-toolkit

Let Grow is a nonprofit organization built around the single conviction that children need more independence, free play, and real-world experience than today's risk-averse culture typically allows. Their Community Toolkit is a practical, free collection of resources for parents, schools, libraries, and community organizations who want to move from agreeing with that conviction to actually doing something about it.

Rather than general advice, this toolkit offers usable templates for letters to send to schools, libraries, and local officials, how-to guides for starting neighborhood play clubs and independence challenges, maps and sign-up forms for building community around the idea that kids can and should do more on their own, and more. Module 8 of this Playbook gave you ideas for what to try within your family. Let Grow's toolkit gives you the tools to extend those ideas into your neighborhood, your school, and your broader community. Because the most sustainable screen boundaries are built by communities, not just individual families.

Organizations Expanding Access

Play Without Limits Project

playwithoutlimits.org

The Play Without Limits Project is a nonprofit founded on a straightforward belief that every child deserves access to the real-world enrichment experiences that build confidence, resilience, and joy, regardless of their family's income or circumstances. Through full-tuition scholarships, the organization connects underserved children with high-quality programs in sports, music, and the arts, working with community partners across the country to remove the financial barriers that too often determine which children get these opportunities and which do not.

The project was founded in 2022 and has served more than 1,000 children to date, with a long-term goal of building an endowment that sustains scholarship funding for generations. Partners include Youth Enrichment Brands programs among others, and 100% of scholarship support covers tuition.

If the access callout in Module 3 of this Playbook resonated with you, this is a reminder that the responsibility for broadening access belongs to organizations and communities, not to individual families and Play Without Limits is one of the places that responsibility is being acted on. Families who want to refer a child in need, organizations looking to partner, or individuals who want to contribute can find more information at the link below.

Learn more or get involved at playwithoutlimits.org

Project Play - Aspen Institute's Sports & Society program

projectplay.org

Rather than connecting individual families to programs, Project Play works to change the conditions under which youth sports exist across the country by identifying access and quality gaps, developing frameworks for the eight sectors that shape children's experience of sport, and building the cross-sector coalitions needed to address them.

For parents, the most immediately useful resource is the annual State of Play report, which tracks youth sports participation, dropout rates, and the systemic barriers that determine which children stay in sport and which leave it. The data is rigorous and the findings are often surprising. Plus, they provide useful context for the decisions families are making at home.

Also worth knowing: Project Play maintains a Children's Bill of Rights in Sports, endorsed by more than 500 organizations, that identifies the minimum conditions under which children should be served through sport, including the right to play in a safe environment, to have qualified adult leadership, and to participate for fun rather than for the benefit of adults. It is a useful reference for any parent evaluating whether a program is actually built around their child's wellbeing.

National Drowning Prevention Alliance

ndpa.org

Drowning is the single leading cause of death for children ages 1–4 and a leading cause for older children and teens. The National Drowning Prevention Alliance exists to change that through education, advocacy, and the practical tools that help families, communities, and aquatic professionals understand what water safety actually requires.

The NDPA's framework for families is built around five layers of protection: physical barriers and alarms, capable adult supervision, water competency, properly fitted life jackets, and emergency preparedness. The framework is deliberately layered because no single measure is sufficient on its own. A child who knows how to swim still needs supervision. A fenced pool still requires a water watcher. The five layers work together, and the NDPA provides free toolkits for parents, caregivers, pediatricians, and teachers that explain how.

Access is central to this work. The NDPA supports swim lesson scholarship and grant programs that help remove the financial barriers separating children from water safety instruction. Because water competency is not an enrichment option, but a safety skill that every child deserves access to, regardless of their family's circumstances.

For families who received this Playbook through SafeSplash or another aquatics program, the NDPA is the broader water safety community that work belongs to.

Music Will (formerly Little Kids Rock)

musicwill.org

Music Will runs the largest nonprofit music education program for K-12 schools in the U.S. today. Founded in 2002 as a free music program at a single school, over the past two decades it has expanded to over 6000 schools in 928 cities and towns across 50 states. To date, Music Will has brought free music lessons and instruments to 1.2 million students across the country with a goal of reaching a million more by 2026. Our national network of modern-band trained teachers delivers highly-inclusive, culturally-responsive, student-centered music education, using genres including hip hop, rock, pop, Latin rap and country.

Positive Coaching Alliance

positivecoach.org/resource-zone/

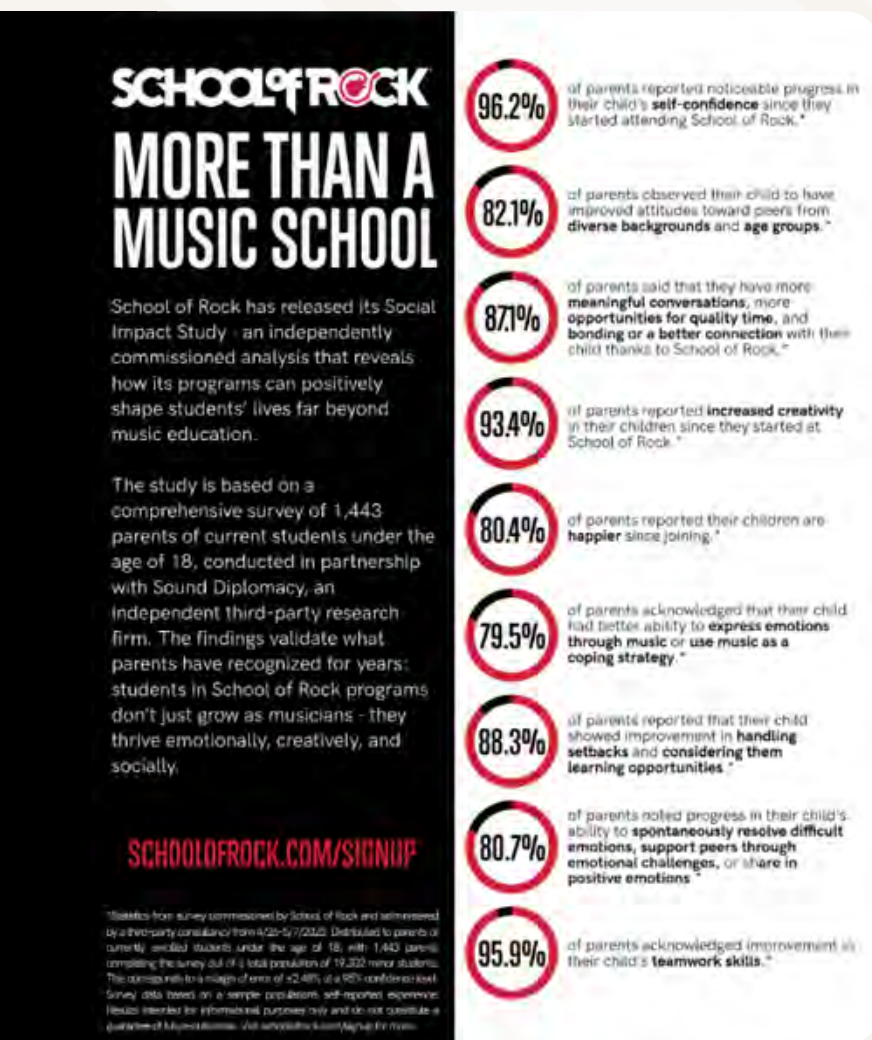
Positive Coaching Alliance is a national nonprofit organization that works to change the culture of youth sports so that every child, regardless of social or economic circumstance, has access to a positive youth sports experience. PCA trains coaches and partners with youth sports organizations, parents, officials and leaders to provide tangible, specific tools and resources.

The Research Behind What We Do

The Generation Real Project is not built on instinct alone. Two significant bodies of research, conducted within our own programs, provide the evidentiary foundation for some of the claims we make throughout this Playbook about what real-world enrichment actually does for children.

School of Rock Social Impact Study, 2025¹⁷

Conducted in partnership with Sound Diplomacy, the School of Rock Social Impact Study draws on responses from 1,443 parents of currently enrolled students, 314 alumni, and 691 staff members across the School of Rock network. It is one of the most comprehensive assessments of a youth enrichment program's developmental impact conducted to date.



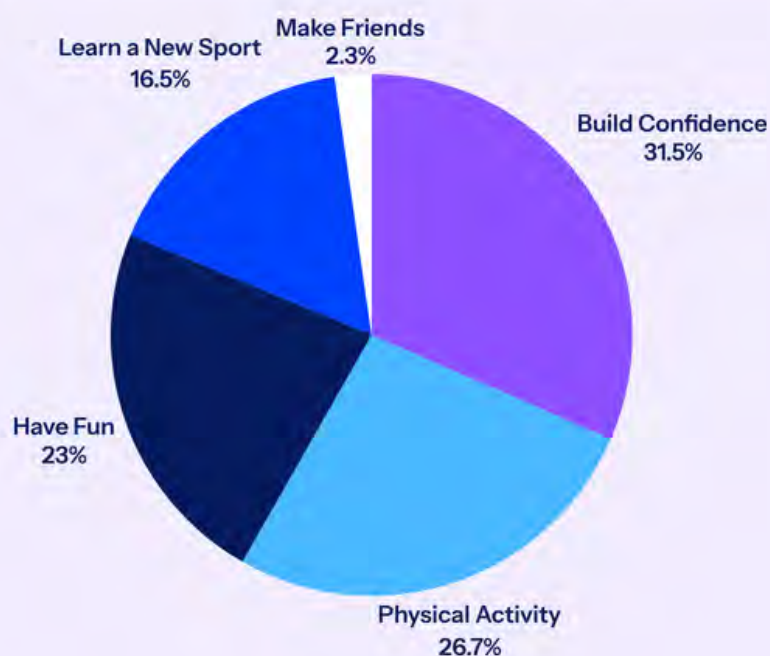
The study also found that when students stay longer, the impact deepens significantly. The difference between a novice student (one season) and a veteran student (seven or more seasons) is transformative across nearly every measured dimension of development.

¹⁷ Statistics from survey commissioned by School of Rock and administered by a third-party consultancy from 4/26-5/7/2025. Distributed to parents of currently enrolled students under the age of 18, with 1,443 parents completing the survey out of a total population of 19,302 minor students. This corresponds to a margin of error of ±2.48% at a 95% confidence level. Survey data based on a sample population's self-reported experience. Results intended for informational purposes only and do not constitute a guarantee of future outcomes.

i9 Sports "Shaping the Future of Sports for Girls" Study¹⁸

With over 1,500 responses from parents who have registered a daughter in i9 Sports programs, this study offers a detailed picture of what parents and children actually value in youth sports — and how often those values diverge from the dominant cultural conversation about athletic achievement.

What is the main reason a parent enrolls their daughter in sports?



Key findings include:

- 92% of parents ranked confidence in the top 3 outcomes they hope their daughter gains from sports
- 6 in 10 parents ranked confidence as the single most important outcome above skill development, athletic achievement, and winning
- When girls themselves were asked what keeps them coming back to sports, having fun, love of the sport, and feeling confident ranked as the top 3 drivers, with winning last
- 82.9% of parents said positive, encouraging coaches were among the top 3 things they look for in a sports program for their daughter
- 69.7% of parents said a supportive team environment was the most important thing they seek as their daughter grows in the sport

Perhaps most strikingly: both parents and daughters, independently, identified winning as among the lowest priorities in their experience of sport. What they both value — what keeps girls playing and parents enrolling — is confidence, fun, friendship, and feeling supported.



Scan to download the full survey results



¹⁸ Survey administered from 10/8-11/8/2025. Data is self-reported experience of 1,550+ parents who registered a female participant in i9 Sports' youth sport programs in the preceding 2-3 years. For informational purposes only.

Find a Youth Enrichment Brands Program Near You

The Generation Real Project is built on a conviction that real-world enrichment is essential for children. The programs below are where that conviction lives in practice, whether that's in rehearsal rooms, on sports fields, in pools, or on playing fields across the country and around the world.

Every program listed here shares a common set of values: that children develop confidence, resilience, and joy through real-world challenge and community. That competence, not excellence, but genuine capability, is what builds lasting self-worth. That belonging to something, and contributing to it, is one of the most protective experiences available to a young person.

SAFESPLASH SWIM SCHOOLS

Find a location near you at safesplash.com

SafeSplash is the world's largest operator and franchisor of swim schools, with locations across the United States and internationally. SafeSplash programs serve children from infancy through adulthood, with a core mission of water safety alongside skill and confidence development.

Learning to swim is one of the most fundamental real-world competencies a child can develop — a life skill with direct safety implications and lasting developmental benefits. SafeSplash instructors are trained to meet each child where they are, building proficiency, confidence, and a lifelong relationship with the water at every level.

Sister brands of SafeSplash include: Miller Swim School & Saf-T-Swim.



i9 SPORTS

Find a league near you at i9sports.com

i9 Sports is the nation's largest multi-sport youth leagues provider, offering recreational leagues for children ages 3 to 14 in sports including flag football, soccer, basketball, baseball, volleyball, and more.

The i9 Sports model is built around the conviction that youth sports should be fun, safe, and confidence-building. Programs are designed to put kids first: positive, encouraging coaches; inclusive, welcoming environments; and a deliberate emphasis on the values that competitive sport, done right, actually teaches.

SCHOOL OF ROCK

Find a school near you at schoolofrock.com

School of Rock is the global leader in performance-based music education, with schools across the United States and internationally. Unlike traditional instrument lessons, School of Rock places students in real bands from the beginning where they work toward live performances, playing in front of real audiences in real venues, playing music they are passionate about.

The program serves children and adults at all skill levels, from complete beginners to advanced players. Students develop musical proficiency alongside confidence, communication, creativity, teamwork, and the specific kind of courage that comes from performing for an audience. The School of Rock Social Impact Study documents what families experience: not just musical growth, but human growth in ways that spill well beyond the rehearsal room.



US SPORTS CAMPS / NIKE SPORTS CAMPS

Find a camp near you at ussportscamps.com

US Sports Camps is the official provider of Nike Sports Camps — the largest network of sports camps in the United States, offering programs in more than 35 sports at locations across the country. Camps are designed for children and teens at every skill level, from first-time participants to competitive athletes.

Beyond skill development, US Sports Camps programs are built around the values that sports, at their best, develop in young people: teamwork, persistence, resilience, leadership, and the understanding that effort is the most reliable path to improvement. Overnight and day camp options are available across a wide range of sports, ages, and locations.

Other organizations within the US Sports Camps family include: KE Camps, NBC Camps, Sports Camps Canada, CMT Learning, U.S. Baseball Academy, and U.S. Softball Academy.

Generation Real Consortium Founding Members

Youth Enrichment Brands has brought together a group of organizations that share a common conviction about what children need and are willing to say so publicly. These organizations also work directly with children and families, have seen firsthand what real-world enrichment produces, and believe the case for protecting childhood from digital displacement and toxic achievement pressure is worth making together. They represent different activities, different age groups, and different communities, but are united by the same north star.

TUTU DANCE SCHOOL

tutuschool.com

A boutique early childhood ballet franchise with locations across the U.S., Canada, and the UK, serving children ages 6 months to 8 years. Built on a joy-first philosophy, their unique approach blends imaginative storytelling, creative movement, and classical ballet to nurture confidence, creativity, and a lifelong love of movement.

APEX LEADERSHIP CO.

apexleadershipco.com

A school-based franchise that combines fitness events and a leadership curriculum to deliver meaningful outcomes for partner schools, building character and community simultaneously.

AVID4ADVENTURE

avid4.com

A youth outdoor adventure company offering screen-free camps and expeditions in climbing, biking, paddling, and hiking; reconnecting kids to nature and building resilience through real-world challenges.

KIDSTRONG

kidstrong.com

A child development training platform that blends physical activity, cognitive development, and character-building into structured programs designed to build confidence and life skills.

3 Takeaways:

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Of everything in this Playbook, what's the idea you find yourself returning to most? Does that tell you something about where your attention and your effort belongs?

SOMETHING TO TRY:

Share one resource from this module with another parent you know who might be wrestling with similar questions. The conversation that follows is often worth more than anything you'll read.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR:

In six months, look back at [Module 2](#) and take the self-assessment again. Notice what has shifted in your family's habits, in your child's confidence, in the quality of your connection. Change is usually quiet, gradual, and only visible when you look back.





Closing Statement

The parents who read a document like this are already paying attention. They already care. That, more than any program or resource, is what makes the difference.

This Playbook does not call for perfection or a complete overhaul of your family's life. So much can be accomplished with small sustainable actions: one more decision, made with a little more intention, in the direction of a childhood that is lived in the real world rather than observed through a screen.

Those decisions accumulate. A season in a program becomes two seasons. A conversation started in the car becomes a habit. A child who finds one thing they love, one place they belong, one adult outside the family who knows their name and believes in them — that child carries something into adulthood that no algorithm can replicate and no ranking can measure.

Real childhood isn't built overnight. It's built one meaningful moment at a time.
The Generation Real Project is here to help.

Rob Price
CEO, Youth Enrichment Brands

