



## **Kids These Days: A lesson from the tortoise about raising children?**

By Dr. David Rideout

An old children's fable tells the story of a slow-moving tortoise who challenges a swift and boastful hare to a foot race. You know how the story ends: the over-confident rabbit strays from the course nibbling grass, pausing to nap while the tortoise plods steadily onward to the finish line.

The moral of the story, of course, is that "slow and steady wins the race." Unlike the hare, who flitted hither and yon, the diligent tortoise became a folklore example of how "fast" does not always mean "best."

Nowhere does the old tortoise's lesson ring more true than when it comes to raising children. In the race to give kids the best of everything, some people think parents today are overloading their children—filling their days with an endless array of extracurricular activities—sports, swimming, dancing, music lessons and so on. Of course, none of these things are bad in and of themselves. But the difficulty comes when there are so many of them that parents are run ragged, or become financially exhausted from trying to keep up with the endless costs associated with them.

There is a growing reaction by some observers that well-meaning parents may be pushing their children to unhealthy levels of physical and emotional stress by all these activities. Instead of letting children explore the world at a more leisurely pace, the treadmill of planned and structured activity can leave kids with little capacity to cope with free time. This leads them to complaining because they are "bored" when their calendar is not full, rather than creating their own variety of play opportunities.

That fast pace is further accelerated by the constant stimulation that comes to kids by way of the internet and social media. This instant access to information can contribute to anxiety for both a parent and a child, putting them on alert for real and imagined threats to their safety. Some parents are too fearful to even let their children play unsupervised. As a result, many children are over-protected and monitored excessively, with parents keeping close tabs on them at all times.

But a new style of parenting is emerging today that calls for children to set the pace. It's called "slow parenting"—not *slow* as in *sluggish*, but *slow* as in *relaxed*. It's a more gentle, unscheduled approach to parenting that lets children discover the world and, to a greater extent, figure it out themselves.

In his book, *In Praise of Slowness*, author Carl Honoré wrote: "I think children need slowness even more than adults do. It's in those moments of quiet, of unstructured time, of boredom even, that kids learn how to look into themselves, how to think and be creative, how to socialize. We are doing

a great disservice to our children by pushing them so hard to learn things earlier and earlier and by keeping them so busy. They need time and space to slow down, to play, to be children.”

As the moderate tortoise reminds us, a gentler pace can still get us where we need to be, and can allow more time to ponder life’s marvels along the way.

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