

# What Are Your Child's Passions?

If you ask most young people today if they have any hobbies, you will receive one of four answers:

1. "No."
2. "What do you mean?"
3. "Yeah. I play video games/watch TV/watch movies."
4. "Yeah..." and then they may actually cite a hobby.

The fourth is the least common.

Dan Scotti, lifestyle writer at the website Elite Daily, and a millennial, wrote a perceptive piece on the matter titled, "Why Don't Millennials Have Hobbies Anymore?"

"None of my friends have hobbies," Scotti wrote. And he was honest enough to include himself in this assessment:

"With a pair of iPhone speakers and a Netflix subscription, I rarely feel as though I'm missing out on anything. ... It's as if modern technology has fooled me into thinking my life is very fulfilling. I mean, I have social media accounts to uphold, television series to chain watch and a whole bunch of dating profiles to swipe through – so, what time do I even have for hobbies?"

He concludes:

"The fact that hobbies may be a thing of the past is an eerie thought. I can't honestly say that I see hobbies such as 'carpentry' making a comeback at any time in the near future. ... As sad as it may seem to older generations, we genuinely have an interest in Instagram, Twitter and other products of

the digital age.”

Clearly, you don't have to be a member of the “older generations” to think this sad.

Here's why:

There is a world of difference between being active and being passive, between creating something and watching something, between doing something and being entertained.

I'm not picking on millennials. The problem is not new. In 1984, Neil Postman wrote a book whose title said it all: “Amusing Ourselves to Death.” It's as relevant today as it was in 1984.

The question, then, is what, if anything, can we do about this?

Parents need to cultivate hobbies or, if you will, passions in their child. The only passion most middle-class and upper-class parents cultivate in their children is getting good grades so that they can get into a prestigious college. But that is misguided. If the most important passion you cultivate in your child is getting good grades, what will your child's most important passion be after leaving school – in other words, for the next 70 years of his or her life?

Schools are complicit. By adding more and more homework hours over the years (which has accomplished nothing; if online communications are indicative, most students leave high school today far less well-educated and proficient in basic skills than high school graduates of decades ago), they deprive children of time to develop a hobby. After hours of homework, parents understandably want to allow their child time to unwind. And what more convenient way to unwind than by watching a screen – whether a smartphone screen, a computer screen or a big screen?

How can parents cultivate interests, hobbies and passions in their child? Most importantly, they can limit time spent in front of a screen. And the earlier in life the better. Then the child has to figure out what to do with the time he or she would have spent in front of the screen.

If I may offer a personal example, when I was in eighth grade, I refused to do almost any homework. My mother was certain – no exaggeration – I'd end up in jail. But while my parents could not force me to do homework, they could enforce a limit on my television watching: one hour a night. So, they asked, what would I do with the rest of my afterschool hours?

Solely as a result of that dilemma, the idea arose that I learn to play a musical instrument (my older brother, who did all his homework, never took up a musical instrument). Thanks to that decision, I learned to read music, fell in love with classical music, taught myself to read orchestral scores, and for the last 25 years, have periodically conducted orchestras (including twice in the last year at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles). All thanks to little TV and little homework in eighth grade.

Instead of doing homework or watching television, I also started reading – newspapers, serious magazines and books – which has remained a lifelong passion. I might add that among my peers who spent their non-leisure time studying for tests and doing homework, not many ended up loving reading. Why? Because they read solely for school and grades rather than for the love of learning.

Technology, excessive homework and the demise of God, religion and love of country – these have all left a generation bereft of passions beyond amusement and getting good grades.

Parents need to ask themselves if this troubles them. And if it does, decide to do something about it – by first asking themselves what they really want for their child.

Dennis Prager's latest book, "The Ten Commandments: Still the Best Moral Code," was published by Regnery. He is a nationally syndicated radio show host and creator of PragerUniversity.com.

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