



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on October 27, 2023

Parents Just Can't Let Go

Parents want to give their kids more independence but just can't bring themselves to do it.

That's the conclusion of a study from the University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital that came out this month. While parents believe it's important for elementary school kids to do things "away from direct adult supervision," the study found, there's nonetheless "a sizable gap between parent attitudes and actions."

How sizable?

Less than 25% of parents with kids ages 5-8 let them prepare their own snack.

And only half the parents of kids ages 9-11 were willing to let their children find an item at the store while they shopped in another aisle.

That has got to be pretty demoralizing if you're a kid. The majority of those parents of 9- to 11-year-olds were also unwilling to let them walk to a friend's home or play in the park with one. (Begging the question: What are parks for?) Just 15% would let their kids trick-or-treat without adult supervision.

These results suggest parents may be unintentionally preventing their kids from getting "the experience and confidence necessary to become a healthy and well-functioning adult," write the survey authors.

Parents do seem aware of this, they found. But they're just too worried to loosen their grip.

The top parental fear is — no surprise — safety. The parents of the 9- to 11-year-olds "worry someone might scare or follow their child."

However, only 17% actually felt they live in an unsafe neighborhood.

Parents also worry that their child isn't ready to do things on their own or doesn't want to. But then there's the fear of being judged as bad parents, or having the cops called on them.

The upshot is that unless something changes, this generation of parents is stuck: regretful that they're helicoptering and unable to stop.

Like addicts.

This situation is exactly why I co-founded Let Grow about five years ago. Our mission is to make it easy, normal and legal for parents to give kids back some independence.

So, we've helped pass "Reasonable Childhood Independence" laws in eight states so far. These say it is not illegal to let your kids play outside or do other childhood things on their own. "Neglect" is only when you put your kid in obvious, serious danger — not any time you take your eyes off them.

The other way we're working to loosen the "helicopter parenting" death grip is by making it easy and normal for parents to let go. We're doing this through the schools. We have a simple curriculum schools can access called "The Let Grow Experience." And it's free!



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The centerpiece of The Experience is a homework assignment teachers can give students once a month, once a semester — whenever — that says, “Go home and do something new, on your own, *with* your parents’ permission — but *without* your parents.”

When all the kids in a school are doing “Let Grow Projects” like walking the dog, running errands or getting themselves to school, parents have a little push to let go. That makes it easier. And they have the added comfort of all the other parents letting go at the same time. That makes it normal. Once the child does something new on their own, BOTH generations end up more confident and the culture starts to change.

“I had no idea my kid was ready to do this!” is the comment we hear second-most often. More often? “I’m so proud!”

American parents don’t mean to be undermining their kids. But thanks to inflated fears and stifling norms, that’s what, accidentally and collectively, we are doing.

“Some parents may be missing opportunities to guide their children in these ‘building block’ tasks of autonomy,” the study concluded.

Yup. They are. Time to turn the culture around.

Lenore Skenazy is president of Let Grow, a contributing writer at [Reason.com](#), and author of Has the World Gone Skenazy? To learn more about Lenore Skenazy (Lskenazy@yahoo.com) and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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