



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on February 23, 2024

The NY Times Says Intensive Parenting Is Best, But...

“Parents Are Highly Involved in their Adult Children’s Lives and Fine With It,” declared the front page of The New York Times. Added the subhead: “New surveys show that today’s intensive parenting has benefits, not just risks, and most young adults seem happy with it, too.”

Is that true? “Intensive parenting” is best, and kids love it, even into adulthood?

Well, it depends on what you consider “intensive.”

The article discussed a recent Pew survey that targeted a rather giant swath of young adults, which they defined as people between the ages of 18 and 34 — that is, everyone from high school seniors to working stiffs Googling “gum pain.” Separately, it surveyed parents of people that age (who are no doubt Googling gum issues themselves. And “Can’t sleep.” And “What tastes like bread but isn’t?”).

One of Pew’s key findings was that “Parents are very involved in their young adult children’s lives.” It judged this in part by the fact that 73% of parents say they text their kids “at least a few times a week.” If that’s very involved, I’m super involved with my sister, my friends and my political discussion WhatsApp group (even though it drives me nuts!). But I wouldn’t say I intensively parent any of them. Texting is so easy and fast that texting family members “at least a few times a week” seems far more “normal communication” than “intensive parenting.”

As for the fact that young adults “turn to their parents for advice on jobs, finances and physical health at least sometimes”: Wouldn’t it be weird if they didn’t? And a little sad? (And how are they *supposed* to find a good periodontist?)

I am on record as recommending that young kids do some exploring on their own *without* a communication device. That way if they get lost or their bike chain falls off, they have to figure out what to do next. They can’t just call a parent. I dearly want them to develop some problem-solving skills and independence. Childhood is the time to do it.

Then, by the time they’re young adults, with any luck (truly a factor), they’re resourceful and capable. But that’s not the same thing as having a *ton* of resources, or being capable of *everything*. So they turn to us, not because we’re helicopters, but because we are happy to help.

Not every problem of young adulthood requires bootstrapping.

Ah, but the survey also found that many parents help their adult children out financially! They do this



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more so when the kids are 18-24 and less so as the years go by. Is that intensive parenting? Excessive assistance? Crippling with kindness?

Well, as the Pew folks also point out: Young adults are going to college in record numbers and racking up record college debt. I'm not actually sure that college is the best path for everyone, but at the moment it's still popular. So, helping young folks get their financial footing doesn't strike me as being a destructive "enabler." Maybe because I've done it myself!

I know there are some who think that any assistance after a certain age is coddling. But I think it's time to flip that. How?

Give them independence as kids. Let them play, explore and take some small risks without adults always supervising. They'll see that you believe in them. That helps them believe in themselves. You're there for them without overprotecting. I realize there are a lot of fuzzy lines, but basically, I'm talking about trust:

You trust that your kids can handle some things.

They trust that you're there for them when they can't.

That's the beginning of a nice relationship. Or, as my husband put it: "At some point, it's not the whole parent-child thing. It's just family."

That would make for a boring New York Times headline. But it's true.

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