



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on June 7, 2024

What '70s Kids Did That Today's Kids Don't

Louise Bates Ames is one of the psychologists who popularized the idea of child development milestones. In the late '70s, she wrote a series of books outlining what kids are capable of at different ages.

The one you may have heard about is “Your Six-Year-Old: Loving and Defiant.” That’s thanks to Chicago blogger Christie Whitley, who reprinted Ames’ 1979 “readiness” list for neurotypical kids entering first grade.

It has since become a sort of cultural touchstone. You’ll find it quoted in “The Coddling of the American Mind,” coauthored by Let Grow Co-founder Jonathan Haidt, and in other articles — and even my “Free-Range Kids” book — that ponder how childhood has changed so much in just a generation or two. And by “changed,” we really mean how it has constricted so severely, how we went from trusting kids to infantilizing them.

How many of us like to be infantilized?

So I reprint the iconic list here to create more pondering and perhaps a renewed recognition of how much kids *can* do — and have done until recently — when we let them!

“The Child Development Milestone Checklist for Kids Age 6” by Louise Bates Ames

1. Will your child be six years, six months or older when he begins first grade and starts receiving reading instruction?
2. Does your child have two to five permanent or second teeth?
3. Can your child tell, in such a way that his speech is understood by a school crossing guard or policeman, where he lives?
4. Can he draw and color and stay within the lines of the design being colored?
5. Can he stand on one foot with eyes closed for five to 10 seconds?
6. Can he ride a small bicycle without helper wheels?
7. Can he tell left hand from right?
8. Can he travel alone in the neighborhood (four to eight blocks) to the store, school, playground or to a friend’s home?
9. Can he be away from you all day without being upset?
10. Can he repeat an eight-to-10-word sentence if you say it once? Ex: “The boy ran all the way home from the store.”



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11. Can he count eight to 10 pennies correctly?

12. Does your child try to write or copy letters or numbers?

Strange to read this, right? It's like a cuneiform recipe for tuna casserole — something we're still familiar with but don't make much anymore.

But what if we did?

What if we sent our kids out to travel alone, four to eight blocks, to a store? Wouldn't that be thrilling?

What if we had them go knock on a friend's door, archaic as that sounds? Wouldn't it be fun?

What if we let them go to the park with friends? Wouldn't they enjoy playing in the real world instead of just online?

The only thing stopping us from doing any of those things is that we've lost our ability to see kids as competent. To regain it, we must put the cart before the horse: Send out our kids out *before* we are quite sure they (or we) can handle it. And then see the results.

Whether they are immediately successful or not doesn't matter. It's like kids taking their first steps: Once they start walking — even with some stumbles — no one ever says, "Great, now go back to crawling."

Kids in the '70s were not another species. Let your 6-year-old walk to the park, and you'll see it for yourself.

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