



Implementation Guide for School Programs

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Welcome to Let Grow!

As most experienced educators can attest, the children walking into our schools today are very different than previous generations, and it's mainly due to a major shift in how their parents and society are treating them. The near-constant barrage of fear from mainstream media and social networks has created a false perception that children of all ages are fragile, helpless, and in constant danger from a terrifying world where predators are waiting around every real and virtual corner. Children who would have been gradually learning independence and social skills by playing outside and interacting with other children of a variety of ages, backgrounds, and cultures are now kept inside or individually shuttled to age-specific, adult-structured, constantly supervised activities.

Ironically, always helping our kids has actually been hurting them, by taking away their chances to negotiate small risks, experience some successes, and learn from their mistakes. Is it any wonder that anxiety and depression are on the rise in children and teens? Or that schools are adding social-emotional learning to their already overwhelming list of responsibilities? **Kids need to do some things on their own to become confident and competent.** But it's hard for parents to let go—and let grow—even if they want to. How can educators help parents give their kids a crucial dose of independence?

They can do The Let Grow Project™.

The Let Grow Project is simple and free to implement, requiring no class time, technology, or special training. It's just a flexible, straightforward homework assignment: Students are told to go home and do something on their own that they've never done before, with their parent's permission: walk the dog, make something to eat, run an errand—almost anything their parents might have done at their age.

THE LET GROW PROJECT IS SO EASY, YET IT HAS ENORMOUS BENEFITS:

Parents recognize their children are more capable than they realized.

Kids become more self-confident, doing more things on their own, including homework!

Teachers and school counselors report increases in student maturity and improved school climate.

Most kids report that doing the Project reduced anxiety levels, increased their self-confidence, and improved their relationships with their parents.



Classroom Implementation

The Let Grow Project™ is purposely designed to be flexible and non-prescriptive. Each family simply decides on a Project that works for their child. Expect to see a wide range of activities in your class and celebrate each for the step toward independence that it is for that student.



Before you start, decide what the student product will be.

Some teachers have students:

- Write down what they did, how it went, and how it made them feel.
- Draw a picture.
- Make a video.
- Create a classroom tree (a leaf that students can fill out is provided in the Resources section).
- Celebrate the activities and growth with a party or assembly.

Determine a due date, allowing a reasonable amount of time for completion—two to five days for a single project or longer to complete a certain number of projects.

HINT

Right before winter or spring break is a great time to assign one or more projects, encouraging students to do something with a group of friends, like playing in someone’s yard or going for ice cream, while parents run some errands.

Classroom Implementation: Introduce

1 How you introduce The Let Grow Project will greatly affect how students and parents react and participate. Before you (or your school) begin, it can be helpful to prepare the parents with a Parent Letter (provided in this guide), or an announcement in a newsletter, or at an event, like back-to-school night. Explain that the students should enjoy doing something by themselves and feel a sense of accomplishment. Parents need to approve their child's project but should be encouraged to allow appropriate independence and not jump in to help or supervise.

Growth is the goal, not perfection.

The first time you introduce the assignment to your class, you may want to describe it as a homework assignment like nothing they've ever had before. Obviously, you should adjust your instructions to suit the age of your students, but what you say might sound something like this:

Now that you're a little older, it is time for you to do something new on your own. When you do, things change. You become a bit more grown up, and your parents see it, too.

*To make that happen, you are going to go home and discuss with your parents what you'd like your Let Grow Project to be. It should be something you feel ready to do on your own or with a friend, but **without an adult**, that you haven't done yet.*

You'll get maximum impact if you assign the project at least a few times during the year. Some schools do it monthly or weekly, with many students doing more projects than were assigned, adopting a growth mindset at home, which translates to greater success in school.

2 Remind students that the point is to do something new independently. If they're very young, it can be drawing chalk art on the sidewalk or making their own lunch. But by the time they're in first or second grade, it should be something more adventurous, preferably outside the home, like playing in the park or walking to a nearby friend's house alone or with a buddy. A little older still and they can increase the distance they go and do something truly "grown up," like buying ingredients from the store and baking a cake. Whatever they do has to be okayed by a parent or caregiver.

3 Give the students the **Student Handout**. You can print it or put it into a Google Doc or your learning management system. The handout should prompt students to start the conversation with their parents and help them select an activity. A project-suggestion list is provided, but you may want to add, subtract, or modify it to fit your students' needs, perhaps letting the kids brainstorm ideas during class.

4 Let the kids know what your expectations are regarding how many activities they should complete in what time and if or how you want them to record their experiences.

Classroom Implementation: Connect

Your students' Let Grow projects can integrate with many of your regular lessons. These are just a sampling of cross-curricular connections that have been shared with us:



Verbal Storytelling — Have students talk about their experiences in pairs, small groups, or to the entire class, giving them the opportunity to talk about themselves and cheer each other on.



Visual Storytelling — Students could create a video or animation about their experience, using a cell phone or other technology available in your school.



Writing Nonfiction — A Let Grow experience is a great subject for writing. It can be the topic for a personal narrative or how-to instructions.



Writing Fiction — Have students explore cause and effect by writing a funny story about a kid who wasn't allowed to do anything alone. Encourage them to take it to a ridiculous extreme. This can be an individual story or a progressive story written by the entire class.



Reading — The theme of growing up and independence is a classic one. Have you noticed that so much of children's literature is about children having adventures and dealing with things on their own? From The Cat in the Hat to the Harry Potter series parents are somehow removed from the picture so the kids can go through their own hero's journey. Encourage students to make relevant connections and understand characters by relating them to their own Project experiences.



STEM — You'll find that some of your students' Let Grow Projects can provide engaging real-life examples when you're exploring concepts like measurement, momentum, and much more!



Social Studies — Learning about maps, geography, and history can all be relevant to a Project. Students who've walked to a friend's house on their own could map their route. Many historical figures were very independent as children and you can encourage discussion about the kinds of things kids did in the past.

Visit LetGrow.org for new ideas!

Classroom Implementation: Assess

Teachers today are expected to assess students constantly and provide objective metrics to show growth, but Projects shouldn't be graded on their own. When they are used in coordination with assignments in other subjects, such as writing, of course the use of traditional scoring or rubrics for that work is appropriate. Many teachers use credit for participation and a student and parent survey to measure social emotional learning to collect important data.

The Project is referred to as "homework" only to generate buy-in from reluctant parents. In reality, the goal is to give kids new alternatives to an afternoon of traditional homework, adult-run activities, or solitary indoor pursuits (often in front of a screen). Getting to this point requires a change in parent behavior and attitudes that only happens when parents hear from the school that this kind of independence is valuable.

Once the students start doing their Projects, they gain self-confidence and competence. Their anxiety and fear of failure decrease. The parents witness this growth, creating a virtuous cycle: Independence leading to more confidence in both parent and child, and confidence leading to more independent activities.

Parenting styles and other factors such as home situations and neighborhood safety will result in a range of Projects among your students. It's important to refrain from judgement, since one child's projects may seem simple or unimportant compared to another's. Teachers see the greatest effects by modeling understanding of differences and encouraging gradual progress as well as relating to any SEL or character programs used in their school.



RESULTS OUR SCHOOLS HAVE SEEN:

- Students gain self-awareness and self-confidence.
- Academically struggling students find new avenues for success.
- Home-school connection strengthens.
- Self-management skills increase and behavior problems decline.
- Parents step back from helping with homework.
- Students interact in new, supportive ways and become excited to hear about their peers' Projects.
- Anxiety levels for students decrease.

We'd appreciate hearing about your results (assuming proper privacy measures) as we work to aggregate anecdotal data and support for multiple formal research studies. If you don't already use some kind of student or parent survey to measure SEL or engagement, we can help!

School & District Adoption

Implementation by a single teacher in a single class can make a difference for those particular students, but imagine if all of the families in your school, or even your entire district, were doing it throughout the year. The Let Grow Project is flexible enough to do with students of any age and makes a great school- or even district-wide initiative that takes minimal effort to deliver high impact. It's a great way to build that important home-school connection and get parents involved in a way that really helps their children and brings together the community.

Letting children play outside or ride their bike somewhere on their own can be scary, especially if parents are afraid their kids will be the only ones out there. The outdoor free play most of us enjoyed in our childhoods is now so rare that kids might not be able to find anyone else to play with. Promoting The Let Grow Project to all of your school families helps create a sense of everyone working together to help their children grow, building relationships with neighbors, and watching out for children without hovering and controlling every interaction.

Do you already have programs in place for social-emotional learning, character education or anti-bullying? Let Grow integrates easily with those initiatives as a natural home extension. Whether as a stand-alone or as part of a larger program, student and parent participation is crucial to real change, so it's a good idea to promote The Let Grow Project through multiple channels. Some things we've seen:

- Introduce Let Grow to parents via a newsletter, parent portal, or your school reader board.

- Have a Let Grow display or table at your back-to-school night or open house.

- Present Let Grow at a PTA/PTO meeting.

- Let students get involved by creating Let Grow posters or displays to share their accomplishments.

- Designate a specific Let Grow month or day of the week.

- Let students share during school announcements or at an assembly.

- Plan a Let Grow event or video where students present their Projects to parents and community members and discuss how doing the Projects affected their personal growth and how their parents have changed, too.

- Include a question or two about Let Grow in your annual parent engagement or school climate survey.

Because students are constantly growing, their projects will evolve over time, so a student who first starts it in kindergarten can keep doing Projects throughout elementary school and beyond. Schools and districts that have fully embraced Let Grow see powerful effects on their students and their school climate. In fact, one superintendent called it a silver bullet!

Supplemental Resources

We've provided these materials for you to make it easy to get started. The handouts can be simply printed or uploaded to your learning management system as is, or you are welcome to modify them or create your own. If you'd like any of the handouts as a modifiable Word or Google document, send an email to **schools@letgrow.org**. You may want to print the Student Handout and Parent Letter back to back or print the Student Handout with the list of ideas on the back. Whatever works best for you and your particular situation is okay by us, and we'd love to see anything you create.

In addition to the handouts, here are some links to articles, videos, and other resources you may find useful:

Let Grow's [Content & Resources](#), where articles, videos, and fun, downloadable content for teachers and students are published regularly

[The Let Grow Project — One superintendent's magic bullet](#)

[How The Let Grow Project can help kids with anxiety](#)

[The School Project That Sets Parents Free](#)



Name _____

My Let Grow Project

THINK OF A PROJECT

How do you decide what to do? Some things that are easy for you are hard for other kids, and some things that are hard for you are easy for them. So there are no right or wrong choices. Jot down some ideas here!

SHARE WITH OTHERS

Talk about your ideas with your parents or caregiver. Ask them to tell you what kinds of things they did when they were your age. Then decide together what projects you will do to let you practice some independence.

CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITES

Use this space to write down your top three project ideas. Then pick one to complete!

1.

2.

3.

Once you complete one
Let Grow Project, look for a new one to try.

KEEP ON GROWING!



Dear Parent,

If you think back on your childhood, a couple of memories probably stand out. Maybe it was the first time you walked to school or met your friends at the local park. Those were important steps toward becoming more independent— a time you got to grow, because your parents let go. You may not have realized it at the time, but the independence you learned in childhood played a big part in your success at school and as an adult.

Unfortunately, many students today struggle with doing things on their own and expect adults to always direct them. This makes it hard for the students to stretch and succeed, or even bounce back from disappointments. We want to help you give your own children that same chance you had to show YOU how amazing they can be. That's what The Let Grow Project is all about.

When kids do something on their own for the first time, something big happens. They realize how deeply you believe in them. You realize how amazingly they're growing up. Worries get replaced by the pride and joy of seeing your kids spread their wings. The Project is eye-opening and heartfilling. All it takes is for you to let your children do something new, on their own or with another child, but without you.

It can be hard to let go, which is why the Project provides this little push. And of course you and your child will discuss together what their Project will be. For the youngest kids it could be something as simple as making a sandwich. For older kids, it can be something a little more independent and outside of the house. The point is to stretch the boundaries of childhood just a little bit, giving kids a chance to grow.

Your child is in for a milestone, and you are too! If you are moved to share on social media to inspire other families (and brag a little!), please tag us **@LetGrowOrg**!

Either way, be prepared for a lump in your throat. And thank you for giving your kids this gift!

Your Friends at Let Grow

TO DETERMINE WHAT THAT PROJECT WILL BE:

SIT down with your children and look over the Let Grow Project handout.

TALK about their ideas and share your own stories.

DECIDE on an independent activity together.

LET GROW Project IDEAS

Do one,
do them all,
GROW



SPEND TIME WITH ANIMALS

Walk the dog.
Pet sit for a neighbor or friend.
Feed the birds.



GO OUTSIDE

Climb a tree.
Ride your bike.
Play in your backyard.
Explore the woods.



GET GROWING

Plant flowers good for butterflies.
Grow something you can eat.
Create a container or fairy garden.



HELP OUT AROUND THE HOUSE

Take out the trash.
Do your laundry.
Get yourself ready for school.
Fix something that is broken.



HEAD TO THE KITCHEN

Bake cookies or a cake.
Make dinner for your family.
Pack your own lunch.



EXPLORE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Walk to a friend's house.
Visit a neighbor.
Go to a store near you.



LOVE YOUR PLANET

Pick up garbage outside.
Donate something you don't use.
Make a piece of "trash art".



HELP OTHERS

Babysit a sibling.
Help a neighbor with a chore.
Teach someone younger how to do something.



HAVE FUN WITH FRIENDS

Host a sleepover.
Put on a play or show.
Start your own club.



BUILD & CREATE

Build something you can use.
Make art outside.
Sew something.



INCREASE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Make a haircut or dentist appointment.
Create a budget.
Mow the lawn.



CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Paint a room.
Build a fort.
Camp out in the backyard.
Volunteer.

Create a Classroom Tree

A large, stylized leaf shape, outlined in black, serving as a template for a classroom tree. The leaf is divided into several sections by curved black lines. The sections are labeled with the following text:

- DATE:** (located in the top left section)
- NAME:** (located in the top middle section)
- WHAT did you do for your LET Grow Project?** (located in the top right section)
- HOW did it go?** (located in the bottom left section)
- WHAT did you like BEST about it?** (located in the bottom right section)

Create a Classroom Tree

DATE: NAME: WHAT did you do for your LET GROW Project?

HOW did it go? WHAT did you like BEST about it?

DATE: NAME: WHAT did you do for your LET GROW Project?

HOW did it go? WHAT did you like BEST about it?

Let Grow: Social and Emotional Learning

Let Grow's mission of promoting childhood independence aligns with the social-emotional learning competencies identified by The Collaborative for Social, Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. Our programs get students practicing SEL skills outside the school day, benefiting them *and* their parents, strengthening the Family and Community wedge of the CASEL Wheel© in the process.

Self-Awareness

Both the Let Grow Project™ and Let Grow Play Club provide opportunities to succeed—and fail a bit—allowing the chance to identify strengths, build self-confidence and cultivate a growth mindset not only for students but also for their parents. Varying emotions will come up, each one a learning opportunity. Experience is a great way to figure out interests and find a passion.

Self-Management

Trying something new on your own can be stressful. Let Grow Projects require goal-setting and self-motivation and can put children in new situations that create opportunities for impulse control and stress-management. Let Grow Play Club gives children the chance to practice self-management, as they'll create games and activities, build things, and negotiate social situations.

Social Awareness

The strength of a person's social awareness is demonstrated through their words and actions, especially in spontaneous situations. Let Grow Projects can be powerful opportunities to develop their social awareness capacity through their participation in activities that expose them to all kinds of diversity and that help others. Play Club offers the chance for students to interact with schoolmates they may not interact with during their normal school experiences, finding common ground through play.

Relationship Skills

Let Grow Play Club fosters the development of relationship skills in an environment closer to the real world than structured after-school activities. Kids communicate, cooperate and negotiate with constantly shifting groups of multiple ages, creating their own rules and handling conflicts. Projects that involve public places often require impromptu communication with strangers. What's better for relationships than building them in real life?

Responsible Decision Making

Let Grow Projects are to be done without adult help, which means that children have the opportunity to analyze situations, identify and solve problems, and evaluate consequences for themselves in real-life, not just hypothetical situations. Play Club ensures mixed-age free play where kids evaluate social situations and the potential consequences of various actions as they create their own activities

