



## How to Create a Let Grow Community

Want to make your town a place where kids walk to school, play outside, run errands – and everyone's supportive? That's a Let Grow Community, and a great place to live. This step-by-step guide explains how some towns are becoming Let Grow Communities – and you can, too.

### 1. Organize an Information Session:

- In Ithaca, NY, three community members reached out to Let Grow to help them organize an open-to-all information session about creating a Let Grow community. They found a place that could hold about 100 people (the local Youth Bureau), organized refreshments (provided by a youth catering group from the YMCA!), printed posters, distributed them around town, and contacted the local media.
- They also reached out to city officials. By including everyone from city council members to Parks and Recreation administrators, they garnered immediate support for their mission, and made sure no officials felt blindsided later.
- In Wilton, CT, the Wilton Youth Council President and her team came to the same conclusion as Ithaca: The town could help its kids become less anxious and more active by encouraging them to walk and play outside. So the team dedicated one of its monthly meetings to explaining the idea of a Let Grow Community. They, too, extended invites to the local community leaders, and everyone else.
- At the event, the core team members introduced the importance of childhood independence and freedom by citing the work of Boston College Professor (and Let Grow co-founder) Peter Gray, especially his TEDx talk on "[The Decline of Play](#)," and his essay, "[The Culture of Childhood: We've Almost Destroyed It](#)." In it, Gray writes that: "*The ultimate goal of childhood is to move away from dependence on parents and establish oneself as one's own person.*" That is not possible if adults are always right there, jumping in like concierges. And yet, if a town has not declared itself Let Grow-friendly, even parents who'd like to loosen the reins don't know if they could be [arrested as negligent](#) for giving their kids some unsupervised time. In a Let Grow Community, parents are not considered negligent unless they show "Blatant Disregard" for their kids' safety and well-being. This also protects families with fewer resources whose kids perhaps walk to school or come home with latchkeys because the parents are working and can't afford constant childcare.
- Introduce the latest research on childhood anxiety, which has been climbing for decades as kids' days get more structured and supervised. [This piece](#) by Julie Lythcott-Haims, former dean of freshmen at Stanford, says, "Recent studies suggest that kids with...rigidly structured childhoods suffer psychological blowback in college." A [New York Times story](#) on teen anxiety reports that, "*In 1985, the Higher Education Research Institute at U.C.L.A. began asking incoming college freshmen if they 'felt overwhelmed by all I had to do' during the previous year. In 1985, 18 percent said they did. By 2010, that number had increased to 29 percent. Last year, it surged to 41 percent.* Those numbers — combined with **a doubling of hospital admissions for suicidal teenagers** over the last 10 years, with the highest rates occurring soon after they return to school each fall — come as little surprise to high school administrators across the country, who increasingly report a glut of anxious, overwhelmed students."



- Introduce the surprising fact that, as [this Washington Post article declares](#), "There's Never Been a Safer Time to Be a Kid in America." (And this good news is not because of "helicopter parenting." Crime is down against adults and we don't helicopter them!) In fact, crime is back to the level it was when gas was 29 cents a gallon, says the [Christian Science Monitor](#). Here's a [page of crime stats](#) that can be shared.
- Introduce the [Let Grow Proclamation](#) for townfolk to start considering. Similar to the [new "Free-Range Parenting" law passed in Utah](#) decriminalizing parents who let their kids play outside or walk to school, the Proclamation says: "*Children have the right to some unsupervised time, and parents have the right to give it to them without getting arrested.*"

2. Recruit Volunteers to a Let Grow Community Task Force:

After inspiring your audience at the Information Session, ask for volunteers! You'll need them to participate in sub-committees, which will drive changes through your community. In Ithaca, attendees were asked to fill out a short information form (found on seats as they arrived). Sample form:

**How do we make Ithaca a Let Grow town?**

**By harnessing your energy and goodwill, and making good things happen!**

**Sign up to hear more about meetings, initiatives and, of course, parties. Meet your neighbors! Have your kids meet their neighbors, too! And if you'd like to volunteer – or even take the lead – on a committee or project, we won't stop you!**

**Thanks! Let's go, and LET GROW!**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

YES! I want to volunteer!

YES! I'd like to lead a project!

3. Hold a Task Force Kick-off meeting – Now that you have a big group of supporters, it's time to take action!

Plan a kick-off meeting for all of your volunteers. Some ideas for the kickoff meeting:

- Start by reminding the group of the importance of what you are trying to achieve. Some resources [here](#) and [here](#) to help.
- Consider some ice-breaker questions they can discuss in small groups and then as a whole:
  - i. What activities did you absolutely love doing as a kid, or did you hear about kids doing in the past?
  - ii. Which of these activities do you not see kids doing now?
  - iii. Is it worth trying to get kids doing them?
- Hold a group brainstorm:



- i. What would your community look like if you are successful? (Think: More kids would be playing outside in their neighborhoods, parks would be filled with kids playing pickup games, [Play Club](#) sessions would be offered by the local parks and rec department as a place for mixed-age kids to play freely together for a hour or more after school or on weekends, kids on their own would be welcomed in local stores/ice cream shops)
  - ii. What are some ways the town can give kids a chance to experience independence?  
(Think: Add Play Club before or after school for elementary students. Roll out the [Let Grow Project](#) in elementary and [middle schools](#), whereby kids are encouraged to go home and do one thing on their own. Do the [Let Grow Project](#) in your own homes. Get parents to join the online Let Grow community at [letgrow.org](http://letgrow.org) so they can find and support each other. Hold a community-wide Neighborhood Block Party to encourage families to get to know one another making it easier for their kids to play together in the neighborhood...)
- Organize your sub-committees:
    - i. Wilton created 3 sub-committees for supporters to join.
      1. School: Responsible for reaching out to school administrators to garner support.
      2. Individual / Neighborhood: Responsible for stitching relationships together in neighborhoods, making it safe and easy for children to play outside together.
      3. Community: Responsible for reaching out to the Mayor and city departments (Police, Parks & Recreation, Fire) to garner support and propose / plan / execute city-wide projects.
    - ii. Which committee should take ownership of which ideas? Assign these.
    - iii. Break out into sub-committee groups. A Core Team member could serve as chairperson of each.
      1. In the breakout sessions, brainstorm further Let Grow ideas.
      2. Begin to break apart each of the ideas into actionable components. What would you need to do first, second, third to implement a particular idea? Who do you need to get buy-in from? How might you get it?
      3. Choose the top 3 ideas to focus on first
      4. Decide your goals for the next 30 days.
      5. Set a date for next sub-committee meeting.
  - Reconvene as a whole Task Force. Ask each sub-committee to present their top 3 ideas.
  - Set a date for the entire Task Force next meeting.
4. REPEAT!
- Continue with your task force and sub-committees.
  - Share progress together.
  - Celebrate successes!
  - Reach out to your local media (blogs, podcasts, radio, newspaper, TV, even school publications) to garner press about the work you are doing. Submit op-ed, such as the [one here](#).
  - Encourage participants in events to share and post about them, to build momentum and spread the word.



- Host an annual or semi-annual Information Session to recruit new task force members.

This may seem like a lot of steps, but in reality, by the time a community decides it wants to become even more warm, welcoming and family-friendly, it's already almost there. After doing a Let Grow project or two (throwing a block party, starting a Play Club, having the school encourage kids to run an errand on their own), pretty soon it will seem normal to see clusters of young people walking to school, riding their bikes, and being part of the scene.

And if property values go up because now everyone wants to live in your town? So be it. (Buy now!)