



# ANNUAL REVIEW

## 2019-2020

**LET GROW** is a national nonpartisan nonprofit founded in 2017 to promote independence as a critical part of childhood. We counter the overprotective impulses of a culture increasingly convinced that kids are in constant physical, emotional and psychological danger, and need adult assistance to do anything safely or successfully. To that end, we equip parents, educators and communities with the tools to give kids more freedom and responsibility. Let Grow is making it easy, normal and legal to raise independent kids ready for a fast-changing future.



This is an interactive Annual Report. When you see this symbol it will play a video or take you to the referenced site.

**LetGrow.org | [info@letgrow.org](mailto:info@letgrow.org)**

© 2018 Let Grow, a 501(c)(3) non-profit  
228 Park Ave S. #77212, New York, NY 10003  
United States of America

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FROM THE PRESIDENT</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>A PROBLEM (AND NEW SOLUTION)</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>OUR BOARD</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>OUR TEAM</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>WHAT WE DO</b>	<b>10-11</b>
<b>WE ARE A NEW VOICE</b>	<b>12-13</b>
<b>PBS NEWSHOUR PROFILE</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>IN THE MEDIA</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>WE CHANGE FAMILIES DIRECTLY</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>ON THE LET GROW WEBSITE</b>	<b>18-19</b>
<b>PARENT TESTIMONIALS</b>	<b>20-21</b>
<b>WE INSPIRE CHANGE THROUGH OUR SCHOOL INITIATIVES</b>	<b>22-23</b>
<b>THE LET GROW PROJECT</b>	<b>24-27</b>
<b>THE LET GROW PLAY CLUB</b>	<b>28-31</b>
<b>THINK FOR YOURSELF</b>	<b>32-35</b>
<b>WE ARE CHANGING THE LAWS</b>	<b>36- 39</b>
<b>LOOKING FORWARD</b>	<b>40-41</b>

A horizontal dashed line in black, spanning the width of the page, positioned above the title.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

*"What's the matter with kids today?"*

Worrying about kids is a perennial pastime, but lately there have been some disturbing trends beyond the lament, from Socrates onward, that kids today are noisy, crazy, sloppy, lazy loafers.

We're hearing about kids not getting their driver's licenses, kids who won't look up from their phones. Kids who think a B+ is an F, who think one "doo-doo head!" shouted across the playground is full-bore bullying. We're hearing about younger kids who make the teacher tie their shoes, older kids who feel a controversial speech on campus is making them literally unsafe, and even older kids – young adults – asking for hand-holding on the job. Seems like everybody is talking about what's the matter with kids today. Even kids! A 2018 Pew Research Center survey found that 70% of teens said anxiety and depression were "major problems among their peers." It's hard to feel hopeful when you're taught that everything could hurt you, or is too much for you to stand.

As one seventh grade teacher told us last year:

*"I was confronted by an array of challenges I had never witnessed in my 25-year career: Students with incredible anxiety issues. Students who broke into tears when a task presented the slightest challenge."*



That's why she got in touch with Let Grow. Because Let Grow is doing something about this. In fact, we're doing a lot of things:

**IN THE MEDIA:** Whether you read us in the papers, hear us at conferences, or catch us on TV, YouTube or podcasts, we are the established experts on the critical importance of childhood independence.

**IN THE SCHOOLS:** Our K-8 programs give kids the crucial push to try new things on their own. Our middle and high school programs teach kids the courage to engage with new ideas. Our college scholarship essay contest gets thousands of high school students to think for themselves.

**IN THE HOME:** Parents looking for encouragement and acceptance as they loosen the reins are finding support, ideas, and each other through Let Grow's social media platforms and in-person events.

**IN THE STATEHOUSE:** Let Grow is working with legislators across the country to pass laws similar to Utah's "Free-Range Kids Law," ensuring that allowing kids some reasonable independence is not mistaken for neglect.

In other words, we are actually retooling the culture to get kids trying new things, listening to new ideas, and venturing beyond their physical, emotional, and intellectual comfort zones. What's more, we're making this independence normal, legal—and cool. Complaining about a problem doesn't change it. Action does. So that's what we're up to. Schools, parents, lawmakers, kids, and supporters are joining us. Onward!



**Lenore Skenazy**  
lenore@letgrow.org

# A PROBLEM (AND OUR SOLUTION)

Several months ago, long before any pandemic, we asked a third grader if there was anything he longed to do completely on his own. “I want to go to karate by myself!” he replied. Atta boy! How would he get there? Walk? Bike? Skateboard? “Um, no,” he said. He would open the car door, get out, and walk himself into the karate school while his mom parked the car in the parking lot. His dream of independence was to spend about 17 seconds unsupervised.

This has us worried.


“Helicopter parenting” — constantly helping and hovering over kids so that nothing “bad” ever happens to them — is not something we blame on individual moms and dads. We blame a culture that believes kids can’t handle anything without adult help. This coddling of American kids may have been well-intentioned, but it is sapping their confidence, curiosity and can-do spirit.

From the playground to the university, things that kids have encountered for eons are now seen as too hard for them to handle: Monkey bars. Tag. Books. Ideas. Speakers. These have all been reframed as possible hazards. Any setback is considered potentially traumatic.

But in fact, the opposite is true. Dealing with some challenges and disappointments “vaccinates” kids against the inevitable bumps in the road ahead. Let Grow is reversing the helicopter trend by posing this vital question:

What does it mean to be raised as vulnerable and dependent rather than resourceful and resilient?

It means we are hurting our kids.



Childhood anxiety is off the charts. One in three teens has an anxiety disorder, according to the National Institutes of Health. Physical endurance has plunged 30% in 20 years. And as for the courage it takes to listen to and openly engage with a wide range of ideas and viewpoints? Students today speak of “walking on eggshells,” fearful that anything they say could hurt someone — or even be seen as hurtful. Treating kids as fragile is making them so.

America cannot keep shielding its young from every risk, disappointment, disturbing comment, or discomfiting idea without becoming a country of endless hurt, helplessness, litigation, and conflict. Raised in the “everybody gets a trophy” era, kids have been so sheltered from life’s everyday ups and downs that they have begun to demand this same excessive protection at college and as they enter the workforce. Business owners are talking about how quickly their newest employees summon the human resources department instead of hashing out a problem themselves.

Outsourcing conflict resolution is bad for business and bad for the collaborative process called democracy.

As Let Grow co-founder Jonathan Haidt is fond of explaining, some things truly ARE fragile. A dropped wineglass will shatter. Some things are resilient: a dropped ball will bounce back, no better or worse. But some things are antifragile. They get STRONGER when they encounter a bit of stress. The immune system, for instance, needs to encounter germs. Bones need to encounter resistance. And kids? They are built to encounter the world, not shrink from it. To grow strong, they need to experience some risk, confusion, and frustration along with joy and exhilaration. This requires a cultural shift away from overprotection — a recognition that constant adult intervention, assistance, and censorship means stunted growth.

At Let Grow, we are working on real-world initiatives to give young people far more physical, emotional, and intellectual independence. Enable kids to experience the habits of freedom when they are young, and they will cherish them throughout their lives. That all starts when the culture (even on quarantine!) begins to let go.

**And Let Grow.**

# OUR BOARD



## Daniel Shuchman

CHAIRMAN, CO-FOUNDER

Daniel is the former long-term Chairman of the Board of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), the pre-eminent nonprofit dedicated to defending free speech on Campus. He is also fund manager at MSD Partners, L.P., a New York-based investment firm. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Daniel has been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and *The Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.



## Lenore Skenazy

PRESIDENT, CO-FOUNDER

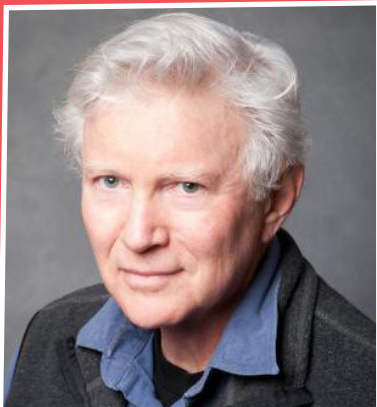
After her newspaper column "Why I Let My 9-Year-Old Ride the Subway Alone" landed her on every talk show from *The Today Show* to *Dr. Phil*, Lenore founded the book and blog *Free-Range Kids*, which launched the movement by that name. Before that she was a reporter and oped columnist at *The New York Daily News* for 14 years. Her reality show *World's Worst Mom*, airs on *Discovery Life* (from time to time, late at night, in re-runs). A graduate of Yale and Columbia, she lives in New York City with her husband and beloved computer. Her sons have (safely!) flown the coop.



## Jonathan Haidt

FOUNDING MEMBER

Jon is a professor at New York University's Stern School of Business. He is also author of the New York Times bestseller, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, and co-author of *The Coddling of the American Mind*. With Skenazy, he co-authored [The Fragile Generation](#), which has garnered over 2,000,000 views. Haidt is also founder of Heterodox Academy, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring viewpoint diversity on campus. A graduate of Yale and the University of Pennsylvania, he has given four TED talks. He lives in New York with his wife and two children.



## Peter Gray

FOUNDING MEMBER

Peter is a research professor of psychology at Boston College. He is author of *Psychology*, an introductory college textbook used at universities around the country, now in its 7th edition. He is also author of *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*. His popular TED talk discusses the same issues. A graduate of Columbia and Rockefeller Universities, he is best known for his research on the role of play in children's development. He lives outside of Boston with his wife, and lectures internationally.

# OUR TEAM



**Tracy Tomasso**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Seamus Condon**  
VP OF COMMUNICATIONS



**Andrea Keith**  
VP OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS



**Stacy Tornio**  
DIRECTOR OF CONTENT &  
ENGAGEMENT



**Irshad Manji**  
DIRECTOR OF COURAGE,  
CURIOSITY AND CHARACTER



**Kristen Brittain**  
DESIGNER





# WHAT WE DO

---

We equip parents, educators, and communities with the tools and confidence to raise independent kids ready to succeed in our ever-changing world.

## OUR VISION

---

All children will have the freedom to explore, play, and think on their own, growing up bold and resilient.



# WE BELIEVE

---

## **Kids can do it themselves.**

When adults step back, kids step up. Children become more confident and capable when they have the freedom they deserve — and their parent's trust.

## **Children are resilient by nature.**

We should let kids make the most of their childhood. It's the time in their lives when they're literally and metaphorically able to fall down, get back up, and try again.

## **Free play is fundamental.**

Children flourish when they're allowed to navigate their own interactions. Unstructured play helps them build essential life skills, like how to solve problems, make smart choices, and work well with others.

## **Letting go is an act of bravery.**

Parents want what's best for their family. It takes courage to resist the pressure to overprotect your kids and to feel confident when you let them do things on their own.

## **Our future depends on how we raise our kids now.**

A society is as strong as its citizens — collaborative people who persevere in the face of obstacles. Instead of shielding the next generation from every bump in the road, we must give them independence to grow into the adults our society needs.



# WE ARE A NEW VOICE FOR CHILDHOOD INDEPENDENCE

Parents are constantly warned about all the things that could hurt their kids. Throughout the media, Let Grow is the trusted authority saying: Actually, children are smarter and safer than our culture would let you believe. For the sake of our kids and our country, it is time to stop overprotecting them.





## To Raise Confident, Independent Kids, Some Parents Are Trying To 'Let Grow'

September 3, 2018 · 5:06 AM ET  
Heard on Morning Edition



**"THIS VERY PESSIMISTIC, FEARFUL WAY OF LOOKING AT CHILDHOOD ISN'T BASED IN REALITY," SKENAZY EXPLAINS. "IT IS SOMETHING THAT WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT."**



## HOW FREE-RANGE PARENTING WORKS



**"CHILDREN ARE GIVEN SMALL OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE SOME MODEST RISKS AND SEE HOW IT FEELS."**

The New York Times

## We Have Ruined Childhood

For youngsters these days, an hour of free play is like a drop of water in the desert. Of course they're miserable.



**"ACCORDING TO THE PSYCHOLOGIST PETER GRAY, CHILDREN TODAY ARE MORE DEPRESSED THAN THEY WERE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND MORE ANXIOUS THAN AT THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR."**



**"ONE OF THE BEST WAYS THAT KIDS LEARN COMPASSION, COOPERATION, TOLERANCE, TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP IS UNSUPERVISED FREE PLAY, AND THAT'S WHAT KIDS DID FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL UP UNTIL THE 1990S."**

The Washington Post

## HOW DARE SHE DASH IN FOR MUFFINS?

By Diane Redleaf and Lenore Skenazy

**"IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING KIDS FROM THE BOOGYMAN, CHILDREN'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT HAS BEEN STRIPPED AWAY."**

# PBS NEWSHOUR

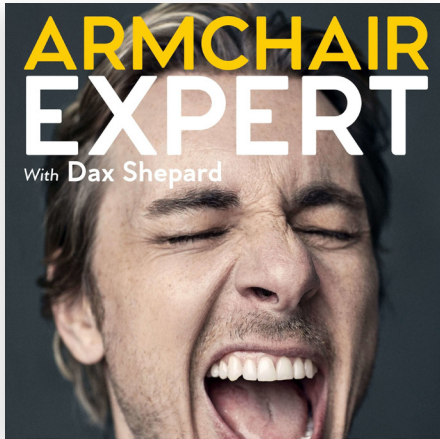
## PROFILES LET GROW

**PBS**  
**NEWS**  
**HOURL**

### PBS Airs 9-Minute Feature on Let Grow



**“There’s concern that overprotective parenting may actually be causing more harm than good. We report on a budding movement that lets kids be kids.”**



# IN THE MEDIA



## PODCASTS

**The Joe Rogan Experience:** Jon Haidt on Free Speech and Let Grow

**Montessori Education:** Are We Overly Protective? With Lenore Skenazy

**How Stuff Works:** How Free-Range Parenting Works

**The New Man Podcast:** Why Play Makes Us Stronger with Peter Gray

**The Brendan O'Neill Show:** Lenore Skenazy on Cotton-Wool Parents

**Dax Shepherd Armchair Expert:** Jon Haidt on Moral Panic on College Campuses, The Benefits of Independence in Childhood



## SPEAKING EVENTS

**Peter Gray:**

US Play Coalition Conference  
*Clemson, SC*

Nature-Based Early Learning Conference  
*New Hampshire*

Ludics Seminar, Harvard University  
*Cambridge, MA*

**Lenore Skenazy:**

Freedom Fest  
*Las Vegas*

International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, *Seville*

Think Small, *Minnesota*

**Jonathan Haidt:**

Google, *Silicon Valley*

TED Talks, *Vancouver*

Duke, *Durham*

Vanderbilt, *Nashville*

Colgate, *New York*

**Irshad Manji:**

National Association of Independent Schools  
*Philadelphia*

Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Services at the King Center, *Atlanta*



## VIDEOS

**C-SPAN:** Lenore Skenazy on Criminalizing Kids Playing Outside.

**Bill Maher:** Jon Haidt, Advocate for Anti-Fragility

**WBUR Boston:** Peter Gray on How Kids Learn While Playing



# WE INSPIRE AND EMBOLDEN FAMILIES

How does the Let Grow mindset take root in the average American home? By entering the daily lives of parents and kids. Our blog features essays, how-tos, and testimonials about giving kids more independence.



# SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW



**15,430**

TOTAL FANS  
AND FOLLOWERS



**4,299,794**




TOTAL  
IMPRESSIONS



**246,026**

COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT

## DECEMBER 2018 TO DECEMBER 2019 COMPARISON

	TOTAL FANS	IMPRESSIONS	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (Reactions, comments, shares)	POST LINK CLICKS
	<b>9,322</b> ↑ 113%	<b>3,470,172</b> ↑ 316%	<b>228,852</b> ↑ 171%	<b>73,402</b> ↑ 225%
	<b>4,066</b>	<b>669,244</b> ↑ 51%	<b>12,896</b> ↓ 8.4%	<b>6,545</b> ↑ 43%
	<b>2,042</b> ↑ 100%	<b>160,378</b> ↑ 7,614%	<b>4,278</b> ↑ 3,525%	N/A

# ON THE LET GROW WEBSITE

## NEWS

### WARNING: A CRYING TODDLER MIGHT CAUSE CPS TO SUSPECT CHILD NEGLECT



## GET INDEPENDENT

### LET'S STOP TELLING OUR KIDS TO BE CAREFUL ALL THE TIME

We say it out of habit, but it really doesn't do much good.



## GET INDEPENDENT

### HOW CAN I LET GROW IF I'M CONSTANTLY WORRIED ABOUT MY KIDS GETTING HURT?



## FREE RESOURCES



### I HAVE THE FREEDOM TO:

Explore  
Build courage  
Figure it out  
Try, fail, try again  
GROW!

Join the movement at  
[LetGrow.org](http://LetGrow.org)

## NEWS

### IN DEFENSE OF WHITE VANS:

They Are Not Coming To Kidnap Our Kids, No Matter What It Says In Your Facebook Feed



## POSTERS & PRINTABLES



**REALLY?:** Our Snopes-like “Really?” page examines which childhood dangers are real and which aren’t, busting many myths. For instance, no American child has been snatched from a parent in a public place, like Target, and sex -trafficked, according to the **Crimes Against Children Research Center**.

**CRIME STATS:** Studies and graphs from trusted sources (FBI, Department of Justice) show that show crime is at a 25-year low.

**THE LET GROW KID CARD:** It’s easier for parents to send their kids outside when they’re carrying a card that says, “I’m not lost or neglected! My parents know I’m outside.” Any doubters can call the parents’ number listed on the card.

# LET GROW ON FACEBOOK

More than \_\_\_\_\_

# 18,000 LET GROW PARENTS

met on our Facebook page to share stories, tips and, of course, **brag**:

"When my youngest turned 7, we got him a firepit. He can set fires independently and loves learning about them! He set this fire tonight!"

"3-year-old helped me with laundry, dusting, and mopping. Yes, I'm running out of entertainment."

"I couldn't find my 13-year-old bookworm this morning! Turns out, he was out in a hammock reading with a blanket in 36-degree weather."

## TO ASK QUESTIONS:

**"Anyone in Southern California and living in a free range-friendly city/community?"**

We're hoping to purchase a home in the next few years (in LA, San Bernardino, or Riverside counties), and I'm hoping to live somewhere where kids play outside!"

## TO FIND SUPPORT:

**Anyone have a 'differently abled' child?** We have a smart, sassy, 3.5 yo with spastic diplegia (can't use her legs) who loves to be outside! Looking for fun new activities and solo play ideas!

# LET GROW VIDEOS

What are kids doing for their Let Grow Projects? How is the Let Grow Play Club making students more confident? What are teachers saying about Let Grow's initiatives?



Let Grow Third Graders  
at a Title 1 School



The Let Grow Play Club



What Kids Get from Free Play



# PARENTS ARE GRATEFUL

**"I cried tonight because for the first time since the birth of my first child eight years ago, I finally don't feel like a failure as a parent."**

**"READING POSTS FROM OTHER MOMS AND DADS ON YOUR SITE HAS MADE ME LESS AFRAID OF OTHER PARENTS."**

**"Thank you for the work you do, it's so important. You're saving childhoods."**



**“I am just so grateful for this website and movement. It has been a HUGE help just to have a name for this parenting philosophy.”**

**“You changed the world. Your influence on my life, and my kids, and even my community, and the people I have talked to as a result of your influence has changed lives.”**

# WE INSPIRE CHANGE THROUGH OUR SCHOOL INITIATIVES



**108 SCHOOLS**  
across **30 STATES**

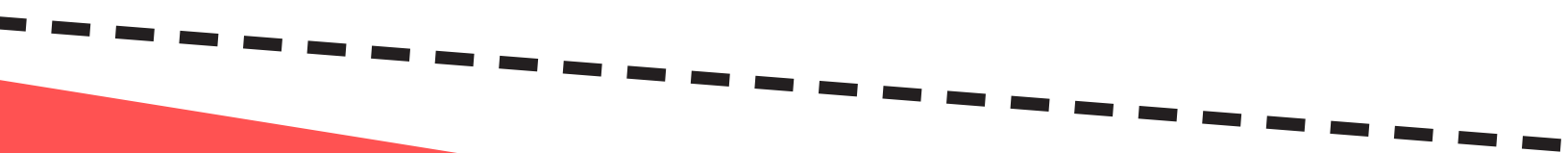
have implemented a Let Grow School Program,  
with more coming on each week.



Of those schools,

**86%** are  
public

**14%** are private  
or charter



**THE LET GROW PROJECT (K-8):** Kids get the homework assignment: Go home and do something ON YOUR OWN: Walk the dog. Make dinner. Run an errand. Once parents see their kids doing something independently, both generations change. The kids blossom. Their proud parents start trusting them with more freedom and responsibility.

**THE LET GROW FREE PLAY CLUB (K-5):** Schools stay open before or after school for free play in the gym or yard WITHOUT ADULT INTERVENTION. The kids learn how to organize their own games and solve their own spats, gaining the social/emotional skills — creativity, collaboration, compromise — that evaporated as outdoor play and recess dwindled.

**THINK FOR YOURSELF COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY CONTEST (MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL):** Students write about a time they demonstrated open-mindedness or resilience. Winners get \$8000 in scholarships. In 2019, over 9000 students entered.

# The Let Grow PROJECT

Long Island, New York, became Case Study Central for Let Grow. We visited schools there to see our initiatives in action and document their impact.

HERE'S WHAT 7TH GRADE KIDS AT LONG ISLAND'S SAYVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL HAD TO SAY ABOUT DOING THE LET GROW PROJECT:

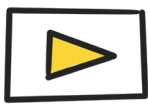
"I stopped asking myself 'What if?' and just did things!"

"The more things I did, the more proud I felt, so I just kept opening my mind to different things."

"This year I started walking home from school. I was too scared before I did the Project."

"I used to ask for help before I even tried to do anything by myself."





*and now I feel like I can do things by myself more.*

AND HERE'S WHAT PARENTS OF STUDENTS  
AT GLEN COVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ON  
LONG ISLAND TOLD US:

"The Project  
let me realize  
that he can do  
things on his  
own."

"She wanted to ride  
her bike. So she went  
down by herself, and I  
still stood at the end of  
my driveway, waiting  
to hear—I don't know  
what. It's ridiculous,  
and she was great."

"What surprised me the most  
was how hard it was at first to  
let go. But now I see that it's  
the very thing I should have  
been doing."

"It's given us all a  
heightened sense of,  
'Wait a second. We don't  
have to be watching  
them on the swing set  
at 10 years old.'"



# The Let Grow Project IN ACTION

We visited Roanoke Avenue Elementary School in the Long Island town of Riverhead, NY, to videotape third grade students, teachers, parents, and administrators discussing the impact of the Let Grow Project. This is a Title 1 school, with a high percentage of children from low income families.



LET  
THEM







*They're starting to do more stuff  
that I used to do*

## WHAT THE RIVERHEAD TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ARE SAYING

**"We thought we were going to do the Project just one time, but after the first week the teachers were like, 'No, we're going to do it every week!'"**

**—THOMAS PAYTON, PRINCIPAL**

**"This is a way for every child and every family in our community to grow and develop into the very best version of themselves."**

**— AURELIA HENRIQUEZ,  
SUPERINTENDENT**

**"Third grade is a spot where kids generally do sink or swim, and the Project gave them every opportunity to swim."**

**—GARY KARLSON, TEACHER**



# The Let Grow PLAY CLUB

## Play Club Changes Everything

It's especially thrilling when an awkward 8-year-old is suddenly a hero to a gaggle of kindergarteners. Now he's proud – changed. Kids make new friends and find new ways to engage with one another. And because the Club is based at school, this works for everyone, even in dangerous neighborhoods: They're all already where the free play is!



FREE  
PLAY



## WHAT TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ARE SAYING:

**"The Let Grow Play Club is the closest thing to a silver bullet I've ever seen in my 20-plus years serving children in education. Kids are less anxious, upset, and depressed."**

**— MICHAEL HYNES, SUPERINTENDENT  
PATCHOGUE-MEDFORD, NY**

**"Our teachers are saying that the kids are more attentive, confident, social— all those soft skills they're getting through the Play Club are helping them in the classroom. We're seeing growth."**

**— LORI KOERNER, PRINCIPAL,  
TREMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, NY**



## WHAT PARENTS AND KIDS ARE SAYING:

**"This is so much better than sitting in the halls before school starts."**

**—STUDENT, CENTRAL ACADEMY  
OF THE ARTS, SC**

**"It really made me think about my own childhood. I grew up in India, in Madras. I walked home from school when I was in third grade. And my mom just said, 'Go play.' That helped me navigate so many emotions, people."**

**— PREETHI RADHAKRISHNAN, PARENT  
GLEN COVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, NY**

# A PLAY CLUB STORY:

Play Club is going great, and I thought I'd share a neat story with you from this week. We have a boy at our school this year who is mean to almost everyone, walks around with a chip on his shoulder, gets in trouble frequently, and actually had three office referrals in one week (last week). This week I talked his mom into letting him try Play Club to see if we can get him to interact with other kids in a positive way. I was honestly a little nervous that he would throw our entire Play Club off kilter by continuing his behaviors during Play Club as well. I was willing to try anything, though, as our hope (of course) is for him to be successful and find his place in our school community.

I introduced him to the rest of Play Club before we began, and some kids had a physical reaction to him just being there because of past experiences with him. At first he just walked around at Play Club alone, but soon after he and another boy started playing, then another boy came over, then a few girls joined in, and before we were done, he was smiling like I'd never seen him smile, running around with other kids and having fun!

One of the teachers supervising the club had actual tears in her eyes after seeing the transformation in him after just one hour of play. I thought you should hear that story.

—KEVIN STINEHART, TEACHER, CENTRAL ACADEMY OF THE ARTS, SC



**BEFORE** Play Club at Central Academy of the Arts, kids have to sit silently inside.



**AFTER** starting Play Club kids can get out and play on their own!



Superintendent Michael Hynes brings the Let Grow Play Club to his schools.

# "THINK FOR YOURSELF"

## HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION



From a standing start in 2018, we received over 3,000 essays.

In 2019, with minimal marketing,

**9264 students submitted essays.**

They were competing for a \$5000 First Place scholarship and three Runner-Up Scholarships of \$1000 each.

Our provocative prompts to get students thinking about the critical importance of free speech and independence included:

"Write a thank-you note to a jerk you learned something from," and, "Who would you choose to censor what you read and hear?"



We've placed the winning essays on prestigious op-ed pages, including *The New York Post*, *New York Daily News*, *USA Today* and *Education Week*.



EDUCATION WEEK

# IN THEIR WORDS

One winner landed a feature on  
"Fox and Friends." She did great!



**DEFENDING FREE SPEECH IN HIGH SCHOOL**

**FOX & friends**

*Think for Yourself Essay Contest Winner Shaina Chen.*

**"On election night I was filled with hope for Hillary, and with each passing hour, I sunk lower into my chair. I didn't want to face the world or my [Republican] friend Marcus. The next few weeks, we didn't speak. I remember our first laugh, in math class. Our laughter increased as the year went on, until one day we actually spoke about the election. It was raw, but we came together again as friends. Since we were both accepted to the same university, we started planning some study sessions and Friday dinners."**

**— Madison Scroggins, Matriculated to Texas A&M University**

**"Politics don't define people. This is the profound lesson I have learned through my friendship with a fellow student named Fred. Our friendship was tested during my sophomore year in high school, when the 2016 presidential election placed us on opposing sides of the most divisive election of a generation."**

**— Carter Moore, Matriculated to Albion College**

**"I have read books that are demeaning to women, seen movies with racist undertones, and so much more. I have asked myself who I would trust to sort or censor this information for me, no name has come to mind."**

**— Eilise McLaughlin,  
Matriculated to California  
Polytechnic State  
University**

# WE ARE CHANGING THE LAWS

As intensive “helicopter” parenting became the norm, it started seeping into the law. Some parents were getting investigated for letting their kids play outside or come home with a latchkey.

This hurts anyone trusting their kids with some independence. But it especially hurts struggling parents like South Carolina single-mom Debra Harrell, arrested for letting her 9-year-old play in a nearby park while she worked her shift at McDonalds. (Shockingly, 53% of all African-American kids will interact with Child Protective Services.)

To combat this trend, in 2018, Utah became the first state to pass a Free-Range Parenting law stating it is NOT NEGLECT to allow kids some independence. This did not go unnoticed!



# THE MEDIA REACTS



## Utah's 'free-range parenting' law is now officially in effect

*Utah is believed to be the first state to legalize the parenting style.*



## PARENTS IN UTAH CAN NO LONGER BE PROSECUTED FOR 'FREE RANGE'



## The Washington Post

### Utah's 'free-range parenting' law said to be first in the nation



## The New York Times

### UTAH PASSES 'FREE-RANGE' PARENTING LAW



### Utah passes 'free-range parenting' law

*Free-range Kids Movement Founder Lenore Skenazy on the newly passed law in Utah, which allows kids to play outside unsupervised.*




# We Are Getting More LAWS PASSED!

**In Colorado, the Reasonable Childhood Independence Bill passed the house unanimously, co-sponsored by a Democrat and a Republican.** While the pandemic put the process temporarily on hold, we are excited about growing awareness, and expect the momentum to carry the Independence bill across the finish line. The same holds true for our bill in South Carolina.

**Meantime, Arkansas passed a “preamble” clarifying that the neglect law should not be used against parents simply trusting their kids with some independence.**

## NEXT STATES WE ARE TARGETING:


-  Colorado
-  Texas
-  Delaware
-  South Carolina
-  Connecticut

**At LetGrow.org we have a packet for any parent or lawmaker interested in the Childhood Independence Bill. It includes:**

- Why a law is necessary
- Sample legislation
- Expert testimony
- What the editorials have to say
- How it helps the working class
- And more!

In South Carolina, Blaise Broadbent, age 9, testified on the Senate floor, saying that if the state rules his younger brothers can't play outside unless his mom is present, "I'll have to play alone and it would be pretty boring."



A horizontal dashed line in black, spanning the width of the page, positioned above the first paragraph.

As we go to print, obviously the childhood landscape — the entire world's landscape — has changed dramatically.

At Let Grow, we did not throw up our hands. We jumped in immediately, recognizing a unique chance to encourage, witness and document our core belief: That when adults step back (or are busy on Zoom), kids step up. We were already changing the culture. COVID-19 has only intensified our purpose.

Some might think that this is the most helicopter-parenting moment of all, but it's not. With school closures, distracted parents, and just about 24 hours of free time to fill each day, we are seeing kids starting to do all the things they didn't have time for — or weren't trusted to do — before. Things like bike-riding, babysitting, bathroom-cleaning, competence-building. As parents and teachers search for more ways to encourage this growth and recognize it as deeply important, we are delivering:

**A “LET GROW INDEPENDENCE KIT” FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS:**

With “distance learning” upon us, we created the free Let Grow Independence Kit, a modification of our school-based Let Grow Project, encouraging parents and teachers to see this as a time kids can learn vital life skills. More than 10,000 parents and teachers have downloaded it to date.

**A NATIONAL “INDEPENDENCE CHALLENGE” FOR KIDS:**

We ran a 3-week contest for kids ages 5-17, asking them to show us what new things they're doing on their own, via essays, photos, and videos. The sunny results have been featured all over the web.

**A HUB OF “COMPETENT-KID” IDEAS:**

Each week, Let Grow publishes news independence-building articles, videos, and downloadable activities.

And to document and author the narrative of how children handled this crisis and learned to thrive, we collaborated with founding board members Jonathan Haidt and Dr. Peter Gray to develop a survey to measure the change in children's "independence behaviors" over the course of the quarantine.

Our stories, photos, survey results and videos document a growing legion of kids experiencing their first taste of independence and create a powerful picture belying the pop culture conviction that kids are falling apart and parents should be helicoptering now more than ever.

Let Grow's counter-narrative makes the case that kids can be more responsible and independent all the time — not just during a pandemic.

Our mission is to encourage, spread and celebrate that change far and wide, to keep the culture from reverting to its over-protecting, bubble-wrapping ways. The result will be an emboldened generation of young Americans ready to work together, make things happen, start businesses, absorb setbacks, solve huge problems, enjoy their lives and soar on unfurled wings.

We can stunt our kids or we can...

Let Grow.

Yours,



**Tracy Tomasso**  
tracy@letgrow.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracy Tomasso', written in a cursive, flowing style.