

In The News

from the Director

Winter Break is fast approaching. I look forward to seeing you at Winterfest 2009: The Sound of Music. This is a joyous time for the children, and they have worked very hard to prepare this program for you. We wish your family health and happiness in the coming new year.

This time of year always give us time to pause and reflect on the past year and our relationships with our children. I think it is appropriate to forward on to you an article in Time Magazine about some recent trends in parenting. Please take the time to read the article and think about the implications the article addresses.

Morrie Sorin

The Growing Backlash Against Overparenting

The insanity crept up on us slowly; we just wanted what was best for our kids. We bought macrobiotic cupcakes and hypoallergenic socks, hired tutors to correct a 5-year-old's "pencil-holding deficiency," hooked up broadband connections in the treehouse but took down the swing set after the second skinned knee. We hovered over every school, playground and practice field — "helicopter parents," teachers christened us, a phenomenon that spread to parents of all ages, races and regions. Stores began marketing stove-knob covers and "Kinderkords" (also known as leashes; they allow "three full feet of freedom for both you and your child") and Baby Kneepads (as if babies don't come prepped). The mayor of a Connecticut town agreed to chop down three hickory trees on one block after a woman worried that a stray nut might drop into her new swimming pool, where her nut-allergic grandson occasionally swam. A Texas school required parents wanting to help with the second-grade holiday party to have a background check first. Schools auctioned off the right to cut the

carpool line and drop a child directly in front of the building — a spot that in other settings is known as handicapped parking.

We were so obsessed with our kids' success that parenting turned into a form of product development. Parents demanded that nursery schools offer Mandarin, since it's never too soon to prepare for the competition of a global economy. High school teachers received irate text messages from parents protesting an exam grade before class was even over; college deans described freshmen as "crispies," who arrived at college already burned out, and "teacups," who seemed ready to break at the tiniest stress.

This is what parenting had come to look like at the dawn of the 21st century — just one more extravagance, the Bubble Wrap waiting to burst. All great rebellions are born of private acts of civil disobedience that inspire rebel bands to plot together. And so there is now a new revolution under way, one aimed at rolling back the almost comical overprotectiveness and overinvestment of moms and dads. The insurgency goes by many names — slow parenting, simplicity parenting, free-range parenting — but the message is the same: Less is more; hovering is dangerous; failure is fruitful. You really want your children to succeed? Learn when to leave them alone. When you lighten up, they'll fly higher. We're often the ones who hold them down.

A backlash against overparenting had been building for years, but now it reflects a new reality. Since the onset of the Great Recession, according to a CBS News poll, a third of parents have cut their kids' extracurricular activities. They downsized, downshifted and simplified because they had to — and often found, much to their surprise, that they liked it. When a TIME poll last spring asked how the recession had affected people's relationships with their kids, nearly four times as many people said relationships had gotten better as said they'd gotten worse. "This is one of those moments when everything is on the table, up for grabs," says Carl Honoré, whose book *Under Pressure: Rescuing Our Children*

from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting is a gospel of the slow-parenting movement. He likens the sudden awareness to the feeling you get when you wake up after a long night carousing, the lights go on, and you realize you're a mess. "That horrible moment of self-recognition is where we are culturally. I wanted parents to realize they are not alone in thinking this is insanity, and show there's another way."

How We Got Here

Overparenting had been around long before Douglas MacArthur's mom Pinky moved with him to West Point in 1899 and took an apartment near the campus, supposedly so she could watch him with a telescope to be sure he was studying. But in the 1990s something dramatic happened, and the needle went way past the red line. From peace and prosperity, there arose fear and anxiety; crime went down, yet parents stopped letting kids out of their sight; the percentage of kids walking or biking to school dropped from 41% in 1969 to 13% in 2001.

Article continues on pages 7 and 8.

Dates to Remember

December 17 (Thursday)

Winterfest 7:00pm
Trinity Prep
No After Care

December 18 (Friday)

Half-Day
11:30 am - Dismissal

December 21 (Monday)

Winter Break Begins
School Closed

January 4, 2010 (Monday)

School Resumes

January 18 (Monday)

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
School Closed

KINDERGARTEN

The **Kindergarten** has completed a unit about Thanksgiving. The unit was culminated by holding a Thanksgiving "Feast" created by the children. Learning fractions was great fun while preparing and baking pumpkin and corn bread. By using the scientific skill of observation, we learned about states of matter (solids, liquids and gases) as they watched the changes that occurred when making cranberry sauce and applesauce. We gained an appreciation of the work involved in making butter when we shook cream until it solidified into butter and exclaimed in excitement when we observed the liquid turn into a solid. Making popcorn (a discovery for which we can thank the Native Americans) was the final part of the feast preparations.

No feast is complete without table decorations and the children made beautiful placemats. They reinforced their patterning skills by making patterns around the edges using items learned about during the unit; Pilgrim girls and boys, pumpkins, apples, cranberries, Indian children, depictions of diagrams of animals found on teepees, etc. The children sat at their places wearing the Pilgrim girl's hats and boy's hats that they made. They ate the food until there was nothing left!!

The children are beginning a unit about the earth's habitats. Being winter, we will begin learning about the Polar Regions. We will review what living things need and discuss that a habitat must provide for those needs. We will learn about the plants and animals that are found on the taiga, the tundra and the ice cap. Each child will select a polar animal to learn about and will research the animal in the computer lab. Each child will choose facts that they did not know before and will write a "report" about their animal to present to the class. The children will also collaborate and create a story including facts about their animals. We will make the story into a play and perform our "original play" for the first and second grades. The children will make their own costumes and decide on the dialogue.

Kindergarten is involved in story writing in their "Story Journals." They are so excited to be writing stories, and are concentrating on having their stories have a "beginning, a middle and an end." A favorite activity is to sit in the "Author's Chair" and share their stories with their classmates.



FIRST and SECOND GRADE

In Language Arts we will finish reading our current novel *Mr. Popper's Penguins* by Richard and Florence Atwater. A classic of American humor, this story of a gentle housepainter and his hilarious penguins will delight us till the holidays. In the spirit of our theme of exploration we thank our very own Mrs. Boyette, Parker's mom, who will talk to us about her explorations in the Antarctic and provide a real, live source of information and background for our novel.

From prehistoric hunters 12,000 years ago to Vikings and now to Spanish explorers, our timeline of exploration is on the year 1508 when Ponce de Leon discovered Florida. We will continue our unit of "Early Explorers of North America" with the English, French and Dutch explorers as we begin to understand the chronological organization of history. We are also recognizing how societies were affected by contacts with diverse people and becoming aware of how religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history.

In Math we are understanding, sorting and problem solving with solid figures and plane figures. We will look for open and closed figures. We will also learn ways to find objects on plane figures, in pictures, on grids and on maps. Congruence and symmetry will be the vocabulary words of the day. Those of us who are learning place value are understanding and problem solving with tens and ones to 100. As always, we work at our own pace and level.

True to our theme of exploration, in Science we will learn about Space Exploration, the first brave explorers and today's great astronauts, their vehicles and their discoveries. They will also be placed on our timeline of exploration from 1957 with the first earth orbiter, Soviet Sputnik, to 2009 with the Space Shuttle flights to the International Space Station. The Orion will also be added since it is expected to become the future of human missions to the moon and Mars in 2015.

THIRD and FOURTH GRADE

Social Studies

Third and Fourth Graders started their study of American Government by examining the Declaration of Independence and will continue with the Constitution. This document is not only the foundation, but also the guardian of the liberties we, as Americans, enjoy today. After gaining a basic understanding of the concepts embodied in this document, students will examine those concepts in greater detail including popular sovereignty, the system of checks and balances, and the creation of laws.

Math

Third and Fourth Grade are putting their problem-solving skills to good use. They have been using some of the skills they have learned this year to help with their Science Flight challenges! They are also working hard on their math skills. Please have your child study math facts every night.

Science

Third/Fourth Grade is currently working on their unit on flight and aerodynamics. We are learning about the laws of physics through our projects. The students have been studying the history of flight and began this unit by building their own kites. The students are going to test their kites and study the forces operating on the kites, include lift, drag, gravity, and tension. The students are also working on their own flight challenges and problem-solving activities in class. We are working in groups to build a series of gliders that can perform different tasks, such as: the longest in-flight time, flying towards a target, and flying while carrying an object. We have also been studying the history of manned-flight and have been researching aviators who have contributed to the study of aerodynamics and flight.



FIFTH and SIXTH GRADE

Language Arts

Students got a lot of good material for writing on our recent Pathfinder trip. They're working on writing articles that bring their experiences canoeing, building shelters, and cooking on an open fire to life for their readers. We're still planning to have a class newspaper sometime in early 2010 and writing these articles has been great practice.

We have three different reading groups in the class now, all reading books that raise some serious and thought-provoking issues. One group is reading *Among the Hidden*, a futuristic tale of a third child hiding from the authorities in a country that only allows two children per family. Another group is reading *Shadow Spinner*, a story set in ancient Arabia where a young girl named Marjan must find new tales for Shahrazad. Life and death hang on the quality of the stories Shahrazad tells the Sultan—a great illustration of the power of words and ideas. Our third group is reading another futuristic novel, *House of the Scorpion*, about the life of a cloned boy in a society where clones are kept by the rich and powerful as a source for organ transplants. Students are meeting in book club groups to discuss their thoughts on these serious issues.

Social Studies

We've been doing a lot of anthropological work this month, studying the hunter/gatherer life. Students have become hunters and gatherers themselves, hunting with cameras and gathering lost and forgotten school supplies. Each picture or gathered item helps contribute to their tribe's food supply, but without enough, some members may not be able to survive. We're also using the inquiry methods of anthropology to study a modern group of hunter/gatherers, the Mbuti pygmies of the Ituri rainforest in central Africa. This group is struggling to maintain its 40,000-year-old way of life in the midst of nearby civil war, deforestation and industrialization. Their survival and the survival of the Ituri itself are closely linked.

Math

Fifth/Sixth Grade has been working on number theory with prime and composite numbers, factoring, and multiples. Some of the students have also begun working with integers and computation involving positive and negative numbers. All of the students are working on problem solving and preparing for the math competition in February. Please work with your child on math facts every night!

Science

Grades 5-6 Science students are exploring the concept of sound and the properties of sound. We have begun with a review of waves and are designing interactive items that will use sound modules harvested from noise-making toys. Along the way, core concepts are being stressed and explored, in keeping with the "science motto" that we have adopted. "Give students a fact, and they will know one thing; give students the tools to figure out how concepts connect, and they will know the secrets of the universe." From waves to noise-canceling technology, students will investigate the myriad of ideas and discoveries, past, present, and future that define the essence of sound and how we perceive it.

We still have agave, aloe, and pitcher plants available for 50¢ to benefit "City Lights" (our budding show choir) and yearbook. If you have a "green thumb" and want to attempt a plant rescue, we have free specimens for the taking.



SEVENTH and EIGHTH GRADE

**Math**

Seventh and Eighth Grade is working on solving multi-step equations and factoring. They are also working hard on sharpening their problem solving skills for the MathCounts Competition in February.

Language Arts

We've been studying the concept of Utopia. First we read an excerpt from Thomas More's original *Utopia*. We've also examined examples of Utopianism in movies and literature. Students even had the opportunity to devise and implement their vision of a Utopian classroom. They were told to ponder the question, "How can we make this a perfect classroom and still achieve all of our (and our parents') educational goals? Some practical and some not-so-practical ideas emerged, along with lots of lively discussion. We're capping off the unit by reading Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and examining the concept of Dystopia, or as one student called it, "Utopia gone wrong."

**Social Studies**

Our class business has really taken off, and the **7-8th Grade** students would like to thank all the families who have been part of it so far. Judging by the significant increase in orders for lunch in this, our second month, things seem to be going well. We learned a lot in our first month about customer service, record-keeping, accounting, and scheduling. We've had some glitches but we've brainstormed practical solutions. All the students are pitching in and working hard to make the business a success.

In the classroom we've been studying the Great Depression and the New Deal. In addition students have been working on making effective Power Point presentations.

**Science**

Grades 7-8 Science students are investigating the properties of waves and, in particular sound waves. Connecting concepts is a core component of an optimum science education, so the Winterfest rehearsals are a perfect opportunity to investigate the qualities of pitch and frequency and how they relate to the human singing voice. Along the way, core concepts are being stressed and explored, in keeping with the "science motto" that we have adopted. "Give students a fact, and they will know one thing; give students the tools to figure out how concepts connect, and they will know the secrets of the universe." From waves to noise-canceling technology, students will investigate the myriad of ideas and discoveries, past, present, and future that define the essence of sound and how we perceive it. Activities will include an attempt at construction of a glass harp, an interactive sound board, and an introduction to electronics.

We still have plants; agave, aloe, and pitcher plants available for 50¢ to benefit "City Lights" our budding show choir and yearbook. If you have a "green thumb" and want to attempt a plant rescue, we have free specimens for the taking.

COMPUTERS

Grades K-4 are reviewing or learning to touch type. Students are progressing steadily and are gradually replacing the “hunt and peck” method--a difficult habit to break. I will be assessing each student’s ability and using various methods to teach and reinforce proper methods and techniques. The students have made wonderful progress in heading their paper, using right and left justification, capitalizing where necessary, and inserting shapes, and information into documents. Upper grades will continue to practice proper typing technique and learn various programs and project enhancing procedures.

Grades 5-6 are practicing word processing and research skills. Students in **Grades 7-8** are using Keynote/PowerPoint skills to create a presentation about the Great Depression. All students will continue to practice proper typing technique and learn various programs and project enhancing procedures.

MUSIC

It is Winterfest time, and our music classes are busy rehearsing and learning our Winterfest 2009 repertoire. The entire school is involved in our performance-intensive music unit which includes: developing our self confidence to sing solo in front of an audience, singing in four-part harmony, singing expressively using musical dynamics, studying Italian and German diction, and developing our stage presence. Grades Kindergarten through Fourth grade are experiencing being a part of a symphony orchestra. We are learning to play many different instruments and on these instruments, we are learning to play several very famous classical melodies. Symphonic rehearsal techniques and etiquette are a part of this symphonic experience.

ATHLETICS

Jump Rope For Heart

We are proud to be participating in the American Heart Association “Jump Rope for Heart” for the 7th year in a row. New School Prep students will help raise money for the American Heart Association as well as raising awareness within their own community about heart disease and stroke. NSP students have raised \$37,000.00 to date. We hope to raise an additional \$3500.00 this year. Look for the envelopes over Winter Break.

Basketball

The Knights’ Athletic Program is proud to announce that we have a boys’ basketball team. Our basketball season is underway with much excitement and commitment. Please check the Athletic Schedule on the website for games, dates and times. Come out to support your favorite Knights.

Pep Rally

We will hold our Winter Sports Pep Rally on Friday, December 18, 2009 at 10:15 on the basketball court to honor our boys’ basketball team. Students may show their school spirit by wearing a piece of crazy clothing.

Noticias en Español (Spanish Newsletter)

Kindergarten

Kids love to learn songs to practice the vocabulary used in class. In this month, we will learn the song “Los pollitos dicen...” and they will make a book about the song. Animals are always a favorite subject for kids. We will learn the vocabulary related to the Farm Animals: el caballo. a vaca. el perro etc.

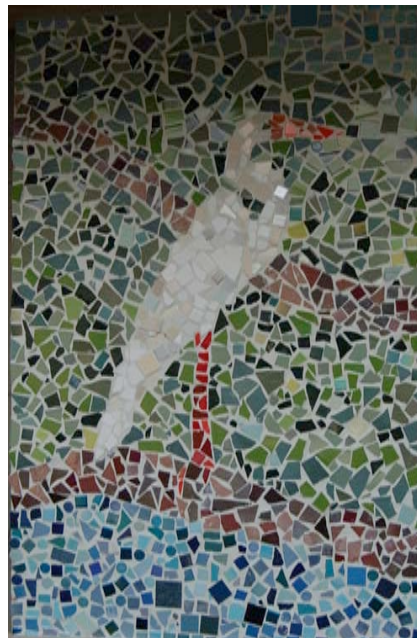
First and Second Grade will learn new vocabulary related to the family: el padre (father), la madre (the mother), la hermana (sister) etc. We will continue working with the mini-books related to current topic (the family). Students will make their own family trees.

Third and Fourth Grade will continue working with present tense –ar verbs and their respective conjugation. They will be introduced to a new vocabulary related to items in the house, such as *baño* (bathroom), *cocina* (kitchen), *la sala* (living room) etc. Students will learn how to describe their own houses using verbs and adjectives.

Fifth and Sixth Grade will learn how to talk about some of their leisure-time activities, make plans with friends and accept or decline invitations. Students will continue working in grammar: present tense verb **Ir** (to go) and **Estar** (to be). Students need to study the new vocabulary every day.

Seventh Grade will learn how to describe vacation choices and activities. Students really love to talk about vacation, so we will pretend that we are going to a country in Latin America. They will talk about the weather, discuss what to take on the trip, and what places of interest they will see and visit in the Spanish-speaking country.

Eighth Grade will start working on how to use comparatives and superlatives in informal conversation; we will also continue working with the preterit (past tense) of the verbs; they will learn how to express and defend an opinion.



Death by injury has dropped more than 50% since 1980, yet parents lobbied to take the jungle gyms out of playgrounds, and strollers suddenly needed the warning label "Remove Child Before Folding." Among 6-to-8-year-olds, free playtime dropped 25% from 1981 to '97, and homework more than doubled. Bookstores offered *Brain Foods for Kids: Over 100 Recipes to Boost Your Child's Intelligence*. The state of Georgia sent every newborn home with the CD *Build Your Baby's Brain Through the Power of Music*, after researchers claimed to have discovered that listening to Mozart could temporarily help raise IQ scores by as many as 9 points. By the time the frenzy had reached its peak, colleges were installing "Hi, Mom!" webcams in common areas, and employers like Ernst & Young were creating "parent packs" for recruits to give Mom and Dad, since they were involved in negotiating salary and benefits.

Once obsessing about kids' safety and success became the norm, a kind of orthodoxy took hold, and heaven help the heretics — the ones who were brave enough to let their kids venture outside without Secret Service protection. Just ask Lenore Skenazy, who to this day, when you Google "America's Worst Mom," fills the first few pages of results — all because one day last year she let her 9-year-old son ride the New York City subway alone. A newspaper column she wrote about it somehow ignited a global firestorm over what constitutes reasonable risk. She had reporters calling from China, Israel, Australia, Malta. ("Malta! An island!" she marvels. "Who's stalking the kids there? Pirates?") Skenazy decided to fight back, arguing that we have lost our ability to assess risk. By worrying about the wrong things, we do actual damage to our children, raising them to be anxious and unadventurous or, as she puts it, "hothouse, mama-tied, danger-hallucinating joy extinguishers."

Skenazy, a Yale-educated mom who with her husband is raising two boys in New York City, had ingested all the same messages as the rest of us. Her sons' school once held a pre-field-trip assembly explaining exactly how close to a hospital the children would be at all times. She confesses to being "at least part Sikorsky," hiring a football coach for a son's birthday and handing out mouth guards as party favors. But when the *Today* show had her on the air to discuss her subway decision, interviewer Ann Curry turned to the camera and asked, "Is she an enlightened mom or a really bad one?"

From that day and the food fight that followed, she launched her Free Range Kids blog, which eventually turned into her own *Dangerous Book for Parents: Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry*. There is no rational reason, she argues, that a generation of parents who grew up walking alone to school, riding mass transit, trick-or-treating, teeter-tottering and selling Girl Scout cookies door to door should be forbidding their kids to do the same. But somehow, she says, "10 is the new 2. We're infantilizing our kids into incompetence." She celebrates seat belts and car seats and bike helmets and all the rational advances in child safety. It's the irrational

responses that make her crazy, like when Dear Abby endorses the idea, as she did in August, that each morning before their kids leave the house, parents take a picture of them. That way, if they are kidnapped, the police will have a fresh photo showing what clothes they were wearing. Once the kids make it home safe and sound, you can delete the picture and take a new one the next morning.

That advice may seem perfectly sensible to parents bombarded by heartbreaking news stories about missing little girls and the predator next door. But too many parents, says Skenazy, have the math all wrong. Refusing to vaccinate your children, as millions now threaten to do in the case of the swine flu, is statistically reckless; on the other hand, there are no reports of a child ever being poisoned by a stranger handing out tainted Halloween candy, and the odds of being kidnapped and killed by a stranger are about 1 in 1.5 million. When parents confront you with "How can you let him go to the store alone?," she suggests countering with "How can you let him visit your relatives?" (Some 80% of kids who are molested are victims of friends or relatives.) Or ride in the car with you? (More than 430,000 kids were injured in motor vehicles last year.) "I'm not saying that there is no danger in the world or that we shouldn't be prepared," she says. "But there is good and bad luck and fate and things beyond our ability to change. The way kids learn to be resourceful is by having to use their resources." Besides, she says with a smile, "a 100%-safe world is not only impossible. It's nowhere you'd want to be."

Dispatches from the Front Lines

Eleven parents are sitting in a circle in an airy, glass-walled living room in south Austin, Texas, eating organic, gluten-free, nondairy coconut ice cream. This is a Slow Family Living class, taught by perinatal psychologist Carrie Contey and Bernadette Noll. "Our whole culture," says Contey, 38, "is geared around 'Is your kid making the benchmarks?' There's this fear of 'Is my kid's head the right size?' People think there's some mythical Good Mother out there that they aren't living up to and that it's hurting their child. I just want to pull the plug on that."

The parents seem relieved to hear it. Matt, a textbook editor, reports that he and his wife quit a book-club because it caused too much stress on book-club nights, and stopped fussing about how the house looks, which brings nods all around the room: let go of perfectionism in all its tyranny. Margaret, a publishing executive, tells her own near-miss story of how she stepped back from the brink of insanity. On her son's fourth birthday, she says, "I'm like 'Oh, my God, he's eligible for Suzuki!' I literally got on the phone and called 12 Suzuki teachers," she says, before realizing the nightmare she was creating for herself and her child. Shutting down your inner helicopter isn't easy. "This is not a shift in perspective that occurs overnight," Matt admits after class. "And it's not every day that I consciously sit down and ask myself hard questions about how I want family life to be slower or better."

Fear is a kind of parenting fungus: invisible, insidious, perfectly designed to decompose your peace of mind. Fear of physical danger is at least subject to rational argument; fear of failure is harder to hose down. What could be more natural than worrying that your child might be trampled by the great, scary, globally competitive world into which she will one day be launched? It is this fear that inspires parents to demand homework in preschool, produce the snazzy bilingual campaign video for the third-grader's race for class rep, continue to provide the morning wake-up call long after he's headed off to college.

Some of the hovering is driven by memory and demography. This generation of parents, born after 1964, waited longer to marry and had fewer children. Families are among the smallest in history, which means our genetic eggs are in fewer baskets and we guard them all the more zealously. Helicopter parents can be found across all income levels, all races and ethnicities, says Patricia Somers of the University of Texas at Austin, who spent more than a year studying the species at the college level. "There are even helicopter grandparents," she notes, who turn up with their elementary-school grandchildren for college-information sessions aimed at juniors and seniors.

Nor is this phenomenon limited to ZIP codes where every Volvo wagon just has to have a University of Chicago sticker on it. "I'm having exactly the same conversations with coaches, teachers, parents, counselors, whether I'm in Wichita or northern Canada or South America," says Honoré. His own revelation came while listening to the feedback about his son in kindergarten. It was fine, but nothing stellar — until he got to the art room and the teacher began raving about how creative his son was, pointing out his sketches that she'd displayed as models for other students. Then, Honoré recalls, "she dropped the G-bomb: 'He's a gifted artist,' she told us, and it was one of those moments when you don't hear anything else. I just saw the word *gifted* in neon with my son's name ..." So he hurried home and Googled the names of art tutors and eagerly told his son all about the special person who would help him draw even better. "He looks at me like I'm from outer space," Honoré says. "I just wanna draw," he tells me. "Why do grownups have to take over everything?"

"That was a searing epiphany," Honoré concludes. "I didn't like what I saw." He now writes and lectures about the many fruits of slowing down, citing research that suggests the brain in its relaxed state is more creative, makes more nuanced connections and is ripe for eureka moments. "With children," he argues, "they need that space not to be entertained or distracted. What boredom does is take away the noise ... and leave them with space to think deeply, invent their own game, create their own distraction. It's a useful trampoline for children to learn how to get by."

Other studies reinforce the importance of play as an essential protein in a child's emotional diet;

were it not, argue some scientists, it would not have persisted across species and millenniums, perhaps as a way to practice for adulthood, to build leadership, sociability, flexibility, resilience — even as a means of literally shaping the brain and its pathways. Dr. Stuart Brown, a psychiatrist and the founder of the National Institute for Play — who has a treehouse above his office — recalls in a recent book how managers at Caltech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) noticed the younger engineers lacked problem-solving skills, though they had top grades and test scores. Realizing the older engineers had more play experience as kids — they'd taken apart clocks, built stereos, made models — JPL eventually incorporated questions about job applicants' play backgrounds into interviews. "If you look at what produces learning and memory and well-being" in life, Brown has argued, "play is as fundamental as any other aspect." The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that the decrease in free playtime could carry health risks: "For some children, this hurried lifestyle is a source of stress and anxiety and may even contribute to depression." Not to mention the epidemic of childhood obesity in a generation of kids who never just go out and play.

Remember, Mistakes Are Good

Many educators have been searching for ways to tell parents when to back off. It's a tricky line to walk, since studies link parents' engagement in a child's education to better grades, higher test scores, less substance abuse and better college outcomes. Given a choice, teachers say, overinvolved parents are preferable to invisible ones. The challenge is helping parents know when they are crossing a line.

Every teacher can tell the story of a student who needed to fail in order to be reassured that the world wouldn't come to an end. Yet teachers now face a climate in which parents ghostwrite students' homework, airbrush their lab reports — then lobby like a K Street hired gun for their child to be assigned to certain classes. Principal Karen Faucher instituted a "no rescue" policy at Belinder Elementary in Prairie Village, Kans., when she noticed the front-office table covered each day with forgotten lunch boxes and notebooks, all brought in by parents. The tipping point was the day a mom rushed in with a necklace meant to complete her daughter's coordinated outfit. "I'm lucky — I deal with intelligent parents here," Faucher says. "But you saw very intelligent parents doing very stupid things. It was almost like a virus. The parents knew that was not what they intended to do, but they couldn't help themselves." A guidance counselor at a Washington prep school urges parents to find a mentor of a certain disposition. "Make friends with parents," she advises, "who don't think their kids are perfect." Or with parents who are willing to exert some peer pressure of their own: when schools debate whether to drop recess to free up more test-prep time, parents need to let a school know if they think that's a trade-off worth making.

A certain amount of hovering is understandable when it comes to young children, but many educators are concerned when it persists through middle school and high school. Some teachers talk of "Stealth Fighter Parents," who no longer

hover constantly but can be counted on for a surgical strike just when the high school musical is being cast or the starting lineup chosen. And senior year is the witching hour: "I think for a lot of parents, college admissions is like their grade report on how they did as a parent," observes Madeleine Rhyneer, dean of students at Willamette University in Oregon. Many colleges have had to invent a "director of parent programs" to run regional groups so moms and dads can meet fellow college parents or attend special classes where they can learn all the school cheers. The Ithaca College website offers a checklist of advice: "Visit (but not too often)"; "Communicate (but not too often)"; "Don't worry (too much)"; "Expect change"; "Trust them."

Teresa Meyer, a former PTA president at Hickman High in Columbia, Mo., has just sent the youngest of her three daughters to college. "They made it very clear: You are not invited to the registration part where they're requesting classes. That's their job." She's come to appreciate the please-back-off vibe she's encountered. "I hope that we're getting away from the helicopter parenting," Meyer says. "Our philosophy is 'Give 'em the morals, give 'em the right start, but you've got to let them go.' They deserve to live their own lives."

What You Can Do

Among the most powerful weapons in the war against the helicopter brigade is the explosion of websites where parents can confide, confess and affirm their sense that lowering expectations is not the same as letting your children down. So you gave up trying to keep your 2-year-old from eating the dog's food? You banged your son's head on the doorway while giving him a piggyback ride? Your daughter hates school and is so scared of failure she won't even try to ride a bike? "I just want to throw in the towel and give up on her," one mom posts on Truconfessions.com. "This is NOT what I thought I was signing up for." Honestbaby.com sells baby T-shirts that say "I'll walk when I'm good and ready." Given how many books and websites drove a generation of parents mad with anxiety, a certain balance is restored to the universe when it becomes conventional for people to brag about what bad parents they are.

The revolutionary leaders are careful about offering too much advice. Parents have gotten plenty of that, and one of the goals of this new movement is to give parents permission to disagree or at least follow different roads. "People feel there's somehow a secret formula for parenting, and if we just read enough books and spend enough money and drive ourselves hard enough, we'll find it, and all will be O.K.," Honoré observes. "Can you think of anything more sinister, since every child is so different, every family is different? Parents need to block out the sound and fury from the media and other parents, find that formula that fits your family best."

Kim John Payne, author of *Simplicity Parenting*, teaches seminars on how to peel back the layers of cultural pressure that weigh down families. He and his coaches will even go into your home, weed out your kids' stuff, sort out their schedule, turn off the screens and help your family find

space you didn't know you had, like a master closet reorganizer for the soul. But any parent can do it just as well. "We need to quit bombarding them with choices way before their ability to handle them," Payne says. The average child has 150 toys. "When you cut the toys and clothes back ... the kids really like it." He aims for a cut of roughly 75%: he tosses out the broken toys and gives away the outgrown ones and the busy, noisy, blinking ones that do the playing for you. Pare down to the classics that leave the most to the child's imagination and create a kind of toy library kids can visit and swap from. Then build breaks of calm into their schedule so they can actually enjoy the toys.

Finally, there is the gift of humility, which parents need to offer one another. We can fuss and fret and shuttle and shelter, but in the end, what we do may not matter as much as we think.

Freakonomics authors Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt analyzed a Department of Education study tracking the progress of kids through fifth grade and found that things like how much parents read to their kids, how much TV kids watch and whether Mom works make little difference. "Frequent museum visits would seem to be no more productive than trips to the grocery store," they argued in *USA Today*. "By the time most parents pick up a book on parenting technique, it's too late. Many of the things that matter most were decided long ago — what kind of education a parent got, what kind of spouse he wound up with and how long they waited to have children."

If you embrace this rather humbling reality, it will be easier to follow the advice D.H. Lawrence offered back in 1918: "How to begin to educate a child. First rule: leave him alone. Second rule: leave him alone. Third rule: leave him alone. That is the whole beginning."

Of course, that was easy for him to say. He had no kids.