

Good Intentions Gone Too Far: Lack of Independence Is Contributing to Record Levels of Childhood Anxiety, Depression

Upcoming article in Journal of Pediatrics finds the decline in children's independence is a cause of the decline in their mental health.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- An article to be published by the Journal of Pediatrics summarizes evidence that our drive to guide and protect children and teens has deprived them of the independence they need for mental health, contributing to record levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide among young people.

The article is titled "Decline in Independent Activity as a Cause of Decline in Children's Mental Wellbeing: Summary of the Evidence." The authors are three prominent researchers specializing in child development:

Peter Gray (Dept. of Psychology and Neuroscience, Boston College)

David F. Lancy (Dept. of Anthropology, Utah State University)

David F. Bjorklund (Dept. of Psychology, Florida State University)



Dr. Peter Gray, expert on the developmental importance of unstructured, unsupervised free time and free play.

The article (accepted Feb. 23, 2023) summarizes multiple lines of evidence that a major cause of the well-documented, continuous increase in anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts among young people over recent decades is the continuous decline, over those decades, in opportunities for children and teens to play, roam, and in other ways engage in activities independent of direct oversight and control by adults.

Children who have more opportunities than others for independent activities are not only happier in the short run, because the activities engender happiness and a sense of trustworthiness and competence, but also happier in the long run, because independent activities promote the growth of mental capacities for coping effectively with life's inevitable stressors.



Children who have more opportunities for independent activities are happier in the short run and in the long run.”

Dr. Peter Gray

The article concludes by noting that concern for children’s safety and the value of adult guidance needs to be tempered by recognition that, as children grow, they need ever increasing opportunity to manage their own activities independently. The article suggests ways by which this can be accomplished in today’s world and ways that pediatricians, family doctors, and public policy makers can help promote such change.

A pre-publication version of the article, in manuscript form, is [available for inspection here](#) or by going to the link at the top of Articles page of Dr. Gray’s website at petergray.org.

For further information and comments, the lead author, Peter Gray, can be contacted at grayp@bc.edu or 508-740-7968.

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