



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on June 16, 2023

Cops Telling Parents How to Raise Their Kids

At last, it was the big day for Tom D's daughter, age 6: The day she would walk to get a Gatorade all by herself.

She wouldn't have to cross any big streets. And her parents made sure she was well-equipped: They gave her some money, her mom's phone so she could be tracked and a hand-drawn map — even though the store was just a few blocks away.

This was in a Detroit suburb. Dad Tom has asked that his last name not be used, for fear of retribution from the cops.

Because cops indeed were called. No sooner had the girl turned onto the larger road where the store is than an older man stopped her and summoned the police.

Tom was tracking his daughter, and when he saw she wasn't budging, he went out to see what was going on. As he arrived, so did two cops.

"They were asking me what I was letting her do and I said, 'I'm letting her walk to get a Gatorade.' And they asked me her age and I told them," Tom recalls.

"They said, 'She's not old enough,' and I remember thinking, 'That's your personal belief. You don't know my kid at all!' But I remember thinking, 'I need to tone myself down.'"

His prudence paid off. "The cops said, 'We don't want to bring Child Protective Services into this,'" indicating that they certainly could, if pushed. So, Tom gave them his name and identification, and promised, "I'll make sure she's inside our house going forward, officer."

And that's what he and his wife have done. They have changed their parenting, not due to actual danger, but other people's perceptions.

This, in turn, has changed their daughter. After the thwarted walk, "She wanted to try almost immediately again," says Tom. "But we did not allow her to. Because if she tries again and they find her again, they're definitely calling Child Protective Services on us."

The spunky little girl asked a few more times. And then... she stopped asking.

Her parents changed, too. "We were both for the idea (of the walk) before anything happened. And afterward it was like, 'Well, let's just be a little more cautious,'" says Tom.

More cautious? They'd prepared their daughter with a map! Money! Phone! How excessively cautious must a parent be?

This is why I never blame parents for "helicoptering." Our culture insists we do it! And yet, as childhood independence has dwindled, childhood anxiety and depression have shot up. This is no coincidence.

The way anyone gets over ANY fear is by facing it — by doing the daunting thing. By contrast, if you



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want to feed anxiety, just treat a competent person as not competent. Warn them that everything's dangerous. Stop them from doing things they could handle.

A walk to the store, for instance.

Until we change our laws and norms, decent parents who want to nurture their children's growing capabilities will be forced to smother them instead.

That's not safety. That's a tragedy.

A kid who's excited to be part of the world shouldn't be locked inside until she finally stops even asking to go out.

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