



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on July 28, 2023

Something Bad Could Have Happened!

It's like steak seasoning. The media takes a rather straightforward story and liberally sprinkles its favorite seasoning on it: a zesty mix of fear, hypothesizing and cherry-picked "man on the street" interviews — and voila! A yummy story the public gobbles down.

You can watch this process in action every September when a child is dropped off at the wrong bus stop somewhere in America (it happens!) and the kid finds their way home, unharmed. That would be a boring story if not for... steak seasoning, this one with extra hypothesizing! "Luckily, Xavier got home safely. But what if he hadn't?" the reporter will intone. Then they'll interview a relative saying they can only imagine all the horrible things that could have happened.



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But didn't.

By simply switching the topic from "capable kid" to "kid who COULD have been killed," the media steers us over to its favorite viewer bait: an unsupervised child in danger.

Which brings us to this story from News 12 in Connecticut. The Nutmeg State — yes, itself a weird seasoning nickname — is one of four that passed a Reasonable Childhood Independence bill this spring. THAT IS FANTASTIC.

The fact that it passed unanimously there, and in Virginia and Illinois, too, should indicate this is not a nutty law. (Nutmeggy, that's another story). Here is how Liz Mair, a political strategist and Stamford mom who advocated for the bill, described it in the News 12 story:

"If you had an 11-year-old who wanted to go three blocks down the street to play soccer at the local park with their also 11-year-old friend, if they were not under some sort of adult supervision, technically their parents could have been charged with a criminal offense."

Pretty straightforward. But the reporter finds a mom — ON THE BEACH — who says SHE keeps an eye on her kids, including a 4-year-old.

As if the law says parents shouldn't! As if the law says if you think your kid is in danger, you are free to ignore the peril. It does NOT say that.

It simply gives parents the right to NOT watch, if they believe *their* particular kid in a particular situation — generally not a preschooler toddling into THE VAST OCEAN — will be fine on their own.

The end of the story gives the worried mom the last word: "I know back in the day that we just — we rode our bikes, our parents said goodbye and that was it, you know? But now, it's a different time."

This "kicker" makes it sound as if it is a far less safe time today — a common misperception. In fact, the crime rate was far higher in the '80s and '90s, when this mom was a kid riding her bike. (Here are some



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real world [crime stats](#). They're heartening!)

So, the deal is this: Reporters feel they must spice up their stories with controversy and, if possible, danger, even when it's hypothetical. And even when a random fact — "It's a different time" — is not a fact at all.

This constant drumbeat of doom, so common we breathe it in without noticing, pollutes our brains and hearts. It makes us feel as if every parenting decision is fraught with peril. So, our job as parents is to try to recognize when this is happening in/on the news.

We also must remember that in some states now — at last! — parents, who know and love their kids more than anyone, are allowed to take their eyes off them before the kids turn 12.

Turn off the news and send those kids out to play!

Lenore Skenazy is president of Let Grow, a contributing writer at [Reason.com](#), and author of Has the World Gone Skenazy? To learn more about Lenore Skenazy (Lskenazy@yahoo.com) and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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