



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on April 5, 2024

WE Are the Reason Kids Are on Screens

A rant. Sorry. But this culture is driving me nuts!

It is BLIND to the idea that kids CAN and in recent history HAVE done some things, on their own, no parents involved, and this was GOOD.

Even HEALTHY.

But one “screen-time specialist” just emailed me with this “helpful” tip on how to get kids off their phones: Have families come up with “non-screen activities.”

I emailed back: “Like what?”

Her reply: “Together, plan a trip to a science museum and look up the exhibits you want to see.”

Why is this making my heart pound like a near-miss car crash?

1) There is simply no notion of the idea that kids can or should spend any time NOT doing something “educational.” Make every moment a lesson! Enriching! Teachable! Maybe they can write their college essay about it!

2) Her idea works ONE TIME for ONE AFTERNOON, making it seem as if any “non-screen time” requires D-Day-like planning.

3) The parent now has a NEW DUTY, which is to “help organize” (totally organize) an outing and then accompany their kid on it. And egads, the money this requires! The tickets, the parking, the gas. The gift shop! And the healthy snacks you must schlep! And, if you work, the time you must take off. Surely your boss will understand and compensate you, right? Your child needs a screen-free afternoon!

4) There is zero mention of, “Heck, kids have entertained themselves forever. Send them outside and they’ll come up with something to do. Give them a flip phone or walkie-talkie if you’re worried.”

In (not so) short: We have disappeared a normal childhood, complete with adventures, MIS-adventures, boredom, free play and poking around. Even “screen-time experts” can’t imagine kids doing something that is not on a screen but not a parent-supervised something-or-other either. An ’80s childhood? “Come home when the streetlights go on”? Down the memory hole!

Well, no wonder kids are on phones! That is the only place we let them play and wander without us.

And no wonder we let them scroll! For parents, phones are the only alternative to a one-family, education-stuffed, infinitely fascinating day care center run by YOU for your own kid(s).

Screen-time experts, worried parents and everyone working to break the hold that phones have on kids, take heed:

NO KIDS WILL GET OFF PHONES IF THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IS INTENSIVE, PARENT-LED, ADULT-SUPERVISED ACTIVITIES. Because no parent will have the time, ability or desire to make that happen on any sustainable basis. Life is not a constant field trip.



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Let Grow — which I run — is the only organization I know of that is trying to make it NORMAL to let kids do some things on their own, unsupervised. It's strange that no one else is flying this flag. They should! Because until we succeed, kids will spend most of their childhoods in the virtual world.

And it's our fault for not giving them that other one — the real world — to enjoy with their friends, without us.

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