

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Towards the beginning of the video, Ms. Skenazy ‘instructs’ children that, “This is the season your parents are bombarded with the kind of warnings previously associated with incoming torpedoes. The basic message: Don’t have fun—it’s too dangerous.” Why do you think that so many ‘experts’ and publications collude to deliver such a terrible message? Why do you think that so many parents are so susceptible to such a message?
- Later in the video, Ms. Skenazy gives an example of an expert giving parents the ‘don’t have fun- it’s dangerous’ warning: “...Karl Neumann of the American Academy of Pediatrics, lays out his own don’ts: “Studies show that children playing in the sand are more likely to become ill than children merely walking on it. And the risk of illness increases with digging in the sand, being ‘buried’ in it, and digging in wet sand.” Do you think it is a sensible, or even realistic, expectation to take a child to the beach and have them not play in the sand? Why or why not? Do you think that advising parents not to let their children play in the sand is good advice? Why or why not?
- Ms. Skenazy shares another example: “Parents Magazine warns that ‘bees are attracted to flowers, so don’t put fragrances or floral-patterned clothing on kids.’ Surely, you’ve seen swarms of bees chasing children in floral prints.” Considering that kids who aren’t wearing fragrances or floral prints get stung by bees all of the time, what exactly is wrong with the reasoning that Parents Magazine is using to ‘warn’ parents? What might some negative consequences be for children whose parents are foolish enough to follow such advice—parents who focus more on coddling rather than letting children learn valuable life lessons and coping skills?
- Further, Ms. Skenazy notes that, “Now there’s a product on the market – a water bottle with a Wi-Fi connection. The app allows parents to monitor how much water their child is drinking. The obsessive little gadget even knows if the kids are secretly not drinking – pouring out water to stop their parents from texting them to drink more. And an animated character on the bottle’s built-in screen grows happier and healthier the more the child drinks.” What might some negative outcomes be for both children and parents who utilize this product? If you had children would you use this product? Why or why not?
- At the conclusion of the video, Ms. Skenazy states, “My summer advice to parents is therefore short and sweet: Tell your kids they can’t swim alone or get into a stranger’s car. And then stop reading other safety tips. Then, maybe—just, maybe—they can have a real childhood.” What do you think Ms. Skenazy means by ‘real childhood?’ What factors do you think contribute towards parents becoming so absurdly overprotective?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Lenore Skenazy

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Why I Let My 9-Year-Old Kid Ride the Subway Alone,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did Ms. Skenazy give her kid prior to leaving him at Bloomingdale’s? Why didn’t she give him a cell phone? What did she trust would happen? What do ‘... hyper parents cite as proof that every day in every way our children are more and more vulnerable?’ Who is Katherine Francis, and what was her reaction to what Ms. Skenazy did? Who is Trevor Butterworth, and what did he say? What does Justice Department data show, in terms of children being abducted by strangers? What did Hara Estroff Marano say? What does the article say is the problem with the ‘everything-is-dangerous’ outlook?
- Do you think that what Ms. Skenazy did with her son was wrong? If yes, why? If no, why not? What do you think is different about the mindset of parents today towards ‘free-range children’ versus the mindset of parents 40 years ago? What else might be different now that could affect how parents treat their children, in terms of independence? In the article, Ms. Skenazy states, “As if keeping kids under lock and key and helmet and cell phone and nanny and surveillance is the right way to rear kids. It’s not. It’s debilitating – for us and for them.” What might the short and long-term consequences of such overprotective parenting be for children? Do you agree with Ms. Skenazy’s point? Why or why not?
- In what ways does the article support the points made in the video? Explain.



QUIZ

LET KIDS
BE KIDS

1. Parents Magazine warns that “bees are attracted to flowers” and so parents shouldn’t _____.
 - a. plant flowers in their backyard
 - b. put floral-patterned clothing on kids
 - c. let children play in the backyard between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
 - d. let children play in the backyard without an antihistamine on hand

2. A water bottle with a wi-fi connection allows parents to _____.
 - a. monitor how much water their child is drinking
 - b. monitor where their children are going
 - c. control the temperature of the water
 - d. keep their children healthy

3. How many gallons of hose water would a child have to guzzle for liver toxicity or cancer to develop?
 - a. 10 gallons
 - b. 12 gallons
 - c. 32 gallons
 - d. There is no mention of the quantity.

4. According to Ms. Skenazy, what should parents tell their kids?
 - a. They can’t get into a stranger’s car.
 - b. They can’t play in the sand.
 - c. They can’t drink water from a hose.
 - d. They can’t play in the sun.

5. The website KidsTravelDoc suggests which of the following for kids to play safely in sand?
 - a. Discourage children from lying directly on the sand.
 - b. Have children wear lightweight, ventilated, hard-soled footwear that covers the toes.
 - c. Avoid digging in wet sand to reduce risk of illness.
 - d. All of the above.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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Why I Let My 9-Year-Old Ride the Subway Alone

By LENORE SKENAZY | April 1, 2008

I left my 9-year-old at Bloomingdale's (the original one) a couple weeks ago. Last seen, he was in first floor handbags as I sashayed out the door.

Bye-bye! Have fun!

And he did. He came home on the subway and bus by himself.

Was I worried? Yes, a tinge. But it didn't strike me as that daring, either. Isn't New York as safe now as it was in 1963? It's not like we're living in downtown Baghdad.

Anyway, for weeks my boy had been begging for me to please leave him somewhere, anywhere, and let him try to figure out how to get home on his own. So on that sunny Sunday I gave him a subway map, a MetroCard, a \$20 bill, and several quarters, just in case he had to make a call.

No, I did not give him a cell phone. Didn't want to lose it. And no, I didn't trail him, like a mommy private eye. I trusted him to figure out that he should take the Lexington Avenue subway down, and the 34th Street crosstown bus home. If he couldn't do that, I trusted him to ask a stranger. And then I even trusted that stranger not to think, "Gee, I was about to catch my train home, but now I think I'll abduct this adorable child instead."

Long story short: My son got home, ecstatic with independence.

Long story longer, and analyzed, to boot: Half the people I've told this episode to now want to turn me in for child abuse. As if keeping kids under lock and key and helmet and cell phone and nanny and surveillance is the right way to rear kids. It's not. It's debilitating — for us and for them.

And yet —

"How would you have felt if he didn't come home?" a New Jersey mom of four, Vicki Garfinkle, asked.

Guess what, Ms. Garfinkle: I'd have been devastated. But would that just prove that no mom should ever let her child ride the subway alone?

No. It would just be one more awful but extremely rare example of random violence, the kind that hyper parents cite as proof that every day in every way our children are more and more vulnerable.

"Carlie Brucia — I don't know if you're familiar with that case or not, but she was in Florida and she did a cut-through about a mile from her house ... and midday, at 11 in the morning, she was abducted by a guy who violated her several times, killed her, and left her behind a church."

That's the story that the head of safetynet4kids.com, Katharine Francis, immediately told me when I asked her what she thought of my son getting around on his own. She runs a company that makes wallet-sized copies of a child's photo and fingerprints, just in case.

Well of course I know the story of Carlie Brucia. That's the problem. We all know that story — and the one about the Mormon girl in Utah and the one about the little girl in Spain — and because we do, we all run those tapes in our heads when we think of leaving our kids on their own. We even run a tape of how we'd look on Larry King.

"I do not want to be the one on TV explaining my daughter's disappearance," a father, Garth Chouteau, said when we were talking about the subway issue.

These days, when a kid dies, the world — i.e., cable TV — blames the parents. It's simple as that. And yet, Trevor Butterworth, a spokesman for the research center STATS.org, said, "The statistics show that this is an incredibly rare event, and you can't protect people from very rare events. It would be like trying to create a shield against being struck by lightning."

Justice Department data actually show the number of children abducted by strangers has been going down over the years. So why not let your kids get home from school by themselves?

"Parents are in the grip of anxiety and when you're anxious, you're totally warped," the author of "A Nation of Wimps," Hara Estroff Marano, said. We become so bent out of shape over something as simple as letting your children out of sight on the playground that it starts seeming on par with letting them play on the railroad tracks at night. In the rain. In dark non-reflective coats.

The problem with this everything-is-dangerous outlook is that over-protectiveness is a danger in and of itself. A child who thinks he can't do anything on his own eventually can't.

Meantime, my son wants his next trip to be from Queens. In my day, I doubt that would have struck anyone as particularly brave. Now it seems like hitchhiking through Yemen.

Here's your MetroCard, kid. Go.