



## The Alarming State of Childhood

Let Grow is the only nonprofit dedicated to reversing the loss of childhood freedom, free time, and unstructured play — the kind of childhood independence that once nurtured generations of self-reliant, resilient, contributing citizens. **Overprotection, perfectionism, fear, and shame have become child-raising norms that affect families in every demographic. But treating children as fragile is making them so.** A recent report by the CDC found 20% of all children in the United States have a mental health issue, and 40% will meet such criteria by age 18. **This is a crisis.** The future of our country depends on how we raise today's kids. This generation needs a chance to develop the confidence, competence, and joy that a childhood with some independence provides.

## Making Independence Normal

When the media think about childhood independence, they contact the undisputed thought leader in this field: Let Grow. Our founders, board members, staff, and supporters are spreading our mission and message across the country — and world — through every channel out there. 2021 brought us attention in newspapers, magazines, blogs, podcasts, webinars, radio, television, books, and social media.

There's an upside to "having some free, unstructured time to discover your actual interests—not for a grade, not for the college counselor, not for a résumé."

— *New York Post*

Skenazy of Let Grow says, "We are underestimating the species."

— *L.A. Times*

"Childhood Independence Could be THE KEY to Happy, Healthy Kids."

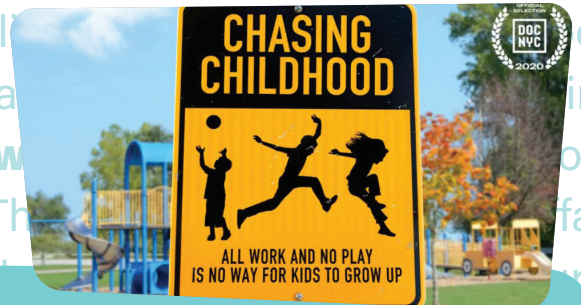
— *The Guardian*

"Our guests say parents and children do not have to be prisoners of their fear."

— *NPR Illinois*

### They Put Us in the Movies!

*Chasing Childhood*, a documentary featuring Let Grow as the antidote to overscheduled, overwhelmed kids, premiered and was screened in schools and communities across the country.



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LET GROW IS A 501(C)3 ORGANIZATION.



## “Are we theeeeere yet?”



No kid on the back of a bike asks that every 10 seconds.

But at Let Grow, it's a key question: Are we “there yet” as a culture? Has Let Grow succeeded in making it easy, normal, and legal to give kids the independence they need to grow into confident, capable, happy adults?

Not yet. But we're on our way!

In just this past (crazy) year, we've made ever-more Americans recognize how developmentally disastrous it is not to let kids do ANYTHING on their own. And — on the flip side — how free time and free play can reverse the soaring rates of childhood anxiety and depression.

You probably found YOUR unsupervised time as a kid incredibly enriching, right?

Taking free time and free play out of childhood is like taking the whole wheat out of bread. The result is softer, squishier — and less fortifying.

Let Grow is re-introducing childhood's missing ingredient: independence. In this era of constant adult supervision, we are giving kids a chance to grow, explore, flail, fail, dust themselves off and flourish.

In 2021, more parents awakened to our message. More schools undertook our initiatives. More media came calling. And two more states passed our “Reasonable Childhood Independence” laws.

Here's how the year unfolded — and why we are incredibly psyched for 2022 and beyond!

Lenore Skenazy, *President*

Visit us at <https://letgrow.org>!

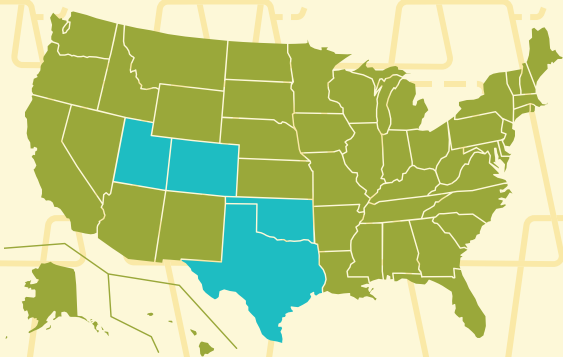
Email [info@letgrow.org](mailto:info@letgrow.org), or contact our Executive Director at [andrea@letgrow.org](mailto:andrea@letgrow.org).

## Making Independence Legal

**“I'm not afraid of my kid being kidnapped. I'm afraid of someone seeing him outside alone and calling 911.”**

It's hard to give your kids some independence when the laws are so vague about what constitutes neglect. In 2018, Utah passed the first law stating that parents who take their eyes off their kids aren't guilty of neglect unless they put them in obvious, serious danger. The pandemic blocked our 2019-2020 efforts, but in 2021, both Oklahoma (pop. 4 M) and Texas (pop. 29.5 M) passed Reasonable Childhood Independence laws. The recent 2022 session added Colorado (pop 5.8M) with unanimous bipartisan support, and many more states are considering bills based on our Model Law.

As Oklahoma's *Enid News* put it, the new law allows parents “...to let their children engage in time-honored childhood activities without fear of being reported for child abuse.” But it's “also being lauded by child advocacy experts [for how it] helps prevent parents from losing custody of their children simply because they are poor or from a struggling single-parent home.”



## Board of Directors

- Daniel Shuchman
- Jonathan Haidt
- Lenore Skenazy
- Samantha Boardman

**Let Grow is making it easy, normal, and legal to give kids the independence they need to grow into capable, confident, and happy adults.**

The pressure to prevent children from experiencing bumps, bruises, frustration, or discomfort impacts every family in the U.S. – and beyond. Even parents who don't mean to "helicopter" or "lawnmower" can find themselves swept along. Documenting the mental health harm caused by constant adult hovering is crucial to changing our culture. This is why the root of our work is the thought leadership of our Founders, Board of Directors and Advisory Council, the support of inspired parents and educators from across the political spectrum, and the research we're doing on the crucial role of childhood independence. While a change in thinking can sometimes lead to a change in behavior, even small behavior changes can truly change a culture. We are making that happen and empowering others to do so, with our programs for Parents, Communities, and Schools, and our Legislative Advocacy.



**Climbing to New Heights**

The 2nd Annual Let Grow Independence Challenge Winner, **Tucker Nicholson, age 6**, didn't just climb a tree – he created his own rappel station and taught neighborhood kids how to use it! He plans to spend his prize money on more ropes and equipment.



**Rewarding Independent Thinking**

\$8000 awarded in our annual Think for Yourself Scholarship. **Cherie Fernandes** won \$5000 and had her first-place essay, "The Day I Discovered My Own Prejudice...in My Teenage Book Club" published in the NJ Star Ledger. Three runners-up got \$1000 each and had essays published, including in the Los Angeles Daily News and the Lexington Herald-Leader.

## Making Independence Easy for Parents & Communities

Through our blog, website, Facebook pages, lectures, newsletters, and social media, Let Grow is where parents gather to learn more about childhood independence and provide each other with advice and support. In 2021, we had 450K website visitors, 830K pageviews, 45K Facebook followers, and 47K newsletter subscribers. Our most popular downloads were our Independence Kit for Kids, and the Let Grow Kid Card. Despite the ongoing pandemic restrictions, Lenore had 12 speaking engagements and brought in \$52K in revenue to further our efforts.

### Some 2021 Facebook Comments from Parents:



*Hello group! Thank you for helping me see my kids as capable! My 4-year-old cooked dinner for the family the other night (pancakes, eggs, and sausage) and she was PROUD. Please keep the positive rhetoric going, I will keep learning from you AND my children!*

*If it's more dangerous than a math worksheet, it's too dangerous. My son told me he wasn't allowed to run at recess. I called the principal and was like "isn't going outside to run around the whole point?" He said they couldn't run bc they might fall or run into another child. My eyes can't roll back in my head far enough.*

*It's hard to do but taking my eyes off my kids has had tremendous confidence-building aspects. And, solving their own issues is essential!*



*Our school has removed equipment that was amazing for kids but too scary for adults. I finally got tired of it, and now that we are starting to be able to interact more as COVID restrictions relax, I have started a Let Grow Play Club at our school. It's embedded in our school's after-school enrichment program and only lasts an hour once a week, but I think our school needs baby steps first. I'm hoping that it is a tool to educate parents and then it expands.*



## Making Independence Easy In Schools

The 2021 school year saw districts dealing with continued chaos and controversy, fractious school board meetings, and increasingly disgruntled teachers, staff, and parents. Let Grow concentrated on grassroots efforts with teachers who recognized that play, social experiences, and independence were as much a victim of remote leaning as academics. We engaged an education PR firm to expand the reach of our K-12 thought leaders, including Superintendent Michael Hynes, Dr. Lori Koerner, Assistant Principal Gary Karlson, and Teacher of the Year candidate, Kevin Stinehart. They promoted Let Grow in regional and national publications, education conferences, webinars, and podcasts. The result? **More than 3,000 schools across all 50 states have embraced Let Grow's mission and programs — a growth of 21%!**

### The Let Grow Project

The Let Grow Project is a "homework assignment" that challenges students to do something they've never done before, without adult help or supervision. It's amazing how something that sounds so simple can have so much impact. Here's a letter from a student to his teacher, three years after doing several Let Grow Projects in middle school:

*Hi, Mrs. M. I hope this email finds you well and happy after our first day of school. I thought I would give you a little bit of insight into the person I am growing up to be right now partially thanks to the program you started with us.*

*I feel like since the last time we talked about 2 years ago I have become a much more mature person who excepts [sic] responsibilities. I have been a lot happier in general than I used to be when I think things like depression and anxiety were still hovering over my head. I feel like I have become much much closer to being a mature adult and my parents are super proud of the person I am becoming.*



268  
BEFORE  
PLAY CLUB

### Let Grow Play Club ✨

*In the years since my school began incorporating more and more unstructured free play into our school day (after school by adding a Play Club), our students are happier, kinder, have fewer behavior problems, have made more friends, feel more in control of their day and their life in general, and in some cases have dramatically changed course from bullying behaviors and frequent office referrals to no bullying behaviors and no office referrals.*

— Kevin Stinehart  
Central Academy  
of the Arts,  
South Carolina

124  
AFTER  
PLAY CLUB



### From Our ED

Change has become constant, and the challenges Let Grow has faced were thankfully not insurmountable. Unlike many nonprofits and businesses in our country, we are still standing, and with our small but mighty team, and the generous support of our donors, both large and small, we're making important progress. We're proud of what we've accomplished, employing the very values we promote; resilience, self-reliance, collaboration, and old-fashioned hard work. The importance of our mission is more critical and urgent than ever, and we are confident that we can accomplish great things. For the children who are our future, we can't afford to fail.

*Andrea L. Keith*

Andrea Keith, Executive Director