

On Children & Risk

Minimal Risk Childhood

/ Hyper Parent

~ 2007

You want to minimize the risk of childhood mishap? Feel inclined to dress your child in cottonwool instead of jeans and ^{those} ugly grippy shoes? Do you pretend to have conversations with friends when really you are just imagining ^{the} your eight year old up a tree, or ^{the} your five year old clinging to a down pipe or ^{the} your eleven year old sucking on stale cigarettes he and his cohort found at the local tip? - right after they dared the smallest of them to swim under water the width of the not so local river? Are you one of these parents and do you fear life or rather the life you fear your child might be having if given half the chance? Then fear no more. Because for the cost of a plasma screen, a stack of Sponge Bob mags and a splendid and stuffed to the brim stay at home indoors project box you need never worry about your child injuring themselves or playing too hard again.

^{Apparently}

~~We are being told~~ that we over protect our children and that in thinking we are looking after them, keeping them from the proverbial boogie-man, (or woman) we are just rearing less resilient human beings. ~~It's been~~ ^{Apparently too} suggested that a significant contributor to childhood depression is that we, the ^{parents} adults, fuss too much. These days we ~~apparently~~ over protect our kids and focus too intently on trying to make them happy, trying to keep them safe and stifled. Our children would be better off being taught, preferably by example, life-coping skills

and resilience. Reminds me of that Japanese proverb,

"Fall seven times, get up eight".

(I think it's Japanese)

In trying so hard to make our children happy,

fulfilled and entertained - God forbid they should be

bored ^{most likely probably} - we are producing a less resilient and less

self-reliant population.

By keeping kids off ~~the streets and~~ ^{Safety} inside the enclosures with their all-wooden and not too high or too ^{unmanageable} scary play equipment - god forbid they should find anything too hard - our children will ^{are} be safe ^{lower} not at risk. Because it's all about low risk living these days. There are just so many damn things, damn people to be wary of. Trust no one, least of all your child, to do the right thing.

Last week when I picked up my five year old from his father's in the country he looked... well, when I first clocked him wrestling to the ground the filthy mongrel dog from next door, all giggles and growls intermingled so I couldn't tell who was doing what, my first thought was, 'how marvellous and outdoorsy and boys-own he looks' and my second thought was, 'for Christ's sake where's his bloody father, our son is going to be disfigured, maimed for life here?' ^{often} Usually when my child returns from his regular half week ^{pragmatically} pastoral rough and tumble at his father's, he is sporting a new cut or bruise or story about a large stick and I am, I admit, ~~sometimes~~ ambivalent. I know that an outdoor life is good, very good for our ^{boy} child's high energy levels, and for his ~~general~~ ^{general} all-round health and well-being, and I know it's good that his father makes him do things for himself more than I do.

^{his father}
It's how he was raised. I was raised to seek help from my mother to fill in ~~my~~ third year university enrolment forms.

How often do we hear this story? 'When I was a kid I'd nick off after breakfast and wouldn't be back home until the street lights came ^{on} or I was starving, or whatever came first. We'd walk or ride to school on our own and there ~~were no~~ ^{were't any} bloody four wheel drives clogging up the streets at school drop off and pick up times back then. We were left alone more and what happened to us? Nothing happened to us.'

I guess things, bad things did happen back then in the sixties and seventies when I was a child but if contemporary parental anxieties are any indicator, lots more bad things happen these days. But the fact is that they don't. Given life is faster and more complicated now, it has simply not followed that the average ^{ten} ~~nine~~ year old child is in more danger walking to school by herself than she was in 1975 - as long as she obeys the look right, look left and right again strategy and doesn't accept boiled lollies from strange men in idling cars that is.

The Internet ~~and~~ My Space ~~and~~ Your Face ~~and~~ His Face and everyone's got a face so lets talk about it and Blog about it on the net all night, is far more scary than untreated tanbark or riding a push bike without a helmet. | reckon.

But still, I confess to being a ^{bit} ~~ted~~ nervous, a little ^{bit} tense ^{when white} whilst watching my son negotiate a tree bough or a one of those awful chain and wall things they still have on some ^{-unreconstructed-} ~~UN-PC~~ play equipment. You know the ^{management} ~~thing~~, where

the child has to hoist himself up the chain on a 90-degree angle to a flat wooden platform.².

On the way home from his dad's we stop at a park to break up the drive and he has a go with the chain thing. "Careful love", I say. "Don't hurt yourself, watch yourself on the chain it might scrape or burn you or *abduct you* something." "I'm okay", he calls back breathless with the effort ^{of} ~~and intent on~~ reaching the summit. And then he falls and hurts himself. I can tell, but he pretends he hasn't and kind of looks the other way for a couple of moments. ~~But~~ I know, I know it, he is hurting like hell. "Show me sweetie, that's okay, it's okay to say it hurts you know, let mummy have a..." "Go away, I know what you are going to say", he darts at me, eyes all wet. "What, what am I going to say to you?" I reply carefully. "You're going to say I told you so, I know you are". I was but I don't. Instead I change the subject, ignore the raised and burning scrape on his stomach and suggest the weird and wonderful church hall country op shop over the road. "Yeah I love that place, you can get really cheap toys and sometimes they aren't even broken", he enthuses. Now that's resilience for you.

① Maybe some of you have seen the kid's film ^{Finding} Nemo? ~~The~~ ^{BUT} little fish Nemo has an overprotective dad and so he ends up rebelling, going out on his own and getting lost. The dad fish is extra anxious about his only little fish because some ~~really~~ bad stuff happened to them both when he was a baby and so his dad wont let him out of his sight now. ~~But~~ ^{and} at the end of the film when father and son are safely reunited ^{and} they have both learned a lesson and ^{just} as Nemo is ~~just~~ about to head off for his first day at fish school he turns back to his 'trying to let go now' ② ③

father and says, "I love you dad' and the parent says
back, 'I love you too. Now go out and ~~have~~ have an adventure!'
And he should have added, 'I'll be here when you get
back'.