



Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry

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FREE RANGE KIDS has become a national movement, sparked by the incredible response to Lenore Skenazy's piece about allowing her 9-year-old ride the subway alone in NYC. Parent groups argued about it, bloggers, blogged, spouses became uncivil with each other, and the media jumped all over it. A lot of parents today, Skenazy says, see no difference between letting their kids walk to school and letting them walk through a firing range. Any risk is seen as too much risk. But if you try to prevent every possible danger or difficult in your child's everyday life, that child never gets a chance to grow up. We parents have to realize that the greatest risk of all just might be trying to raise a child who never encounters choice or independence.

Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry Details

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From Reader Review Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry for online ebook

Meredith says

I was one of the many parents who thought Lenore was off her rocker for letting her 9 y/o take the subway alone in NYC. As a native of Boston, I am comfortable in big cities and on the subway and I would never let my 9 y/o do that and still think she was really unwise in that choice.

That said, this was a great book. Since I knew I wasn't going to agree with everything she said, I expected to disagree with a lot of the book. Instead, I realized how much I've held my own kids back and that a lot of what she said had a great deal of value. I think this is a great read for all parents- especially those of us who tend to hold our kids back. I especially appreciated the section in the end about how rare things happen statiscly. Who knew that no one has ever been hurt from an apple with razor blades? The author took her time to review her subject well.

I'm glad the author had the guts to write this book knowing that so many people were criticizing her parenting. It's really worth reading.

Cass says

It is about time I reviewed this book. I first read it when I was pregnant with my first daughter. That time in life when you begin educating yourself as to what type of parent you will be. I had a strong background in education, but my parenting influences were all a bit scattered. This was one of the first books that I really felt strongly connected to.

The standout point when I first read this book was about risk assessment. Rather than just following the crowd in the name of protecting your child, stop and assess what dangers they are likely to face, and how likely are those risks. It was an interesting notion that your child is many times more likely to be killed in a car accident then to be abducted while playing at a park. Yet we fear the latter, while unhesitatingly buckling our kids into the car.

The books is about the idea that by protecting our kids from everything we risk a greater danger, and that is having kids who are unable to protect themselves from anything, and even worse, they grow lacking the skills and abilities that can only be acquired through living life, something that becomes harder and harder as parents worry about everything.

I have increasingly noticed this at kid's playgrounds. These are safe environments for kids to play, swings, slides, soft-turf. However I never see kids just playing in them anymore. Whenever I take my kids I see a playground full of parents hovering around kids and offering advice. I will tell you two stories.

The other day I was at a large park on a busy day. The place was packed and my 3yo and 18mo were playing on one piece of equipment, it was pretty cool, it had three slides coming off it. Older kids, wet from the nearby beach, where sliding down the large spiral slide. My 18mo was playing at the bottom of a smaller slide, climbing up it and sliding back down. I stood away back to watch. I saw kids of all ages (18mo - 10yo) interacting with each other. The older kids slid fast down the spiral slide, but at the bottom they would call

out to each other, informing the kids at the top whether the path to the bottom was clear, or yelling out to tell them to wait if kids were in the road. On the smaller slide that my 18mo was making herself a nuisance (my opinion) at I saw slightly bigger kids either going slowly down the slide, or waiting for her to move, or just switching to the parallel slide. But this is where things got controlling. I felt guilty, my 18mo was 'hogging' the slide, she was not taking turns, and she was using the slide the wrong way. I tried to move her but she kept going back. For her, the bottom of the slide was the most interesting place in the whole playground, and she had no concept of taking turns. I felt awful, I felt like I wasn't controlling my child well enough. Other parents where controlling their kids, I started to notice. I saw parents telling their kids the rules "no climbing up the slide" said one mum, "no going down the slide while wet" said another mum, "take turns" said a Dad. Parents where everywhere, not standing back like me, but right there in the middle of the equipment. I realised how ugly it was, then I started to think about what was important. Those kids barely even noticed my 18mo at the bottom, I was embarrassed, but they just got on and played around her, I was worried she would get bowled over by a kid sliding too fast, but the kids just made allowances for her. The kids of all ages were interacting and having fun despite these stupid rules parents were trying to impose. I mean, why not climb up the fucking slide? It was fun and heaps of kids were doing it, only to be chastened by their parents. It was a frigging playground, the domain of kids, there were 3 slides, surely the kids were capable of deciding their own rules? Apparently not. In fact one 6yo girl came up to me and parroted her mother, she pointed at my 18mo and told me "you are not allowed to climb up the slide". I looked at her very nicely and said "well you had better go tell her". I was thinking, it is your playground, you guys can make and enforce the rules.

I left the playground a bit shocked and disgusted. If we can't trust our kids to make up their own rules, and play together in a playground, what hope do we have? There needs to be a big yellow line drawn around a playground that says "parents stand behind this line"... Hmmm, one day I might go engage in some guerrilla playground tactics.

Okay my second story is a smaller one. I was at a family party, lots of kids running around the backyard, there was a swing set, a tree swing, and a trampoline. To get to the backyard the kids had to climb over a 2ft wall. A couple of blocks had been positioned to help the kids over it. So my 18mo was trying to get to the swings, she climbed up the blocks onto the wall, then she stood up and overbalanced and fell into my waiting arms. I put her on the ground and she tried a second time and toppled backwards again. Both times it was tempting to reach out a hand and help her over the wall, but on the third time she changed her method and didn't stand at the top. Now I was confident that I didn't need to hover over her anymore. She went up to the swing set where parents hovered and worried. I reassured them my daughter was fine, and that falling was quite a good thing (I don't want broken bones or too much blood, but falling is good for kids). I noticed a 9yo girl hovering protectively around my 19mo and I thought that that is as it should be. Let the kids play, they are not horrid monsters, they will look out for each other. When did it happen that parents hovered at the swing set, and at the trampoline, not for conversation but for fear that the kids would get hurt. The bigger issue is that we are unknowingly setting up kids who are unable to assess their own risks.

This book is about this kind of stuff.

Lisa Butterworth says

This book was really good for the parent (like me) (sometimes) who needs a cheerleader to tell me my more laid-back less helicoptery parenting choices are okay, and it doesn't mean I don't love my kids. She wrote this

book after she wrote an article in the New York Star (I think) about how she let her nine year old take the subway home, by himself. And even though such an adventure is statistically much safer than driving him home, she became dubbed 'the worst mom in America'. Skenazy has a great funny voice and the book flows smooth and easy.

It's interesting to hear all the statistics, How kids are safer now than they've ever been. How crimes towards children have been falling off a cliff since the early 90s (she compared it to the dive in Berney Madoff's birthday cards). It's interesting how far out of line our fears are to the actual danger, how teaching stranger danger is actually making our kids less safe.

Where it doesn't really live up to my hopes . . . Basically it has a lot of the same information as DeBecker's Protecting the Gift, but not as much and not as helpful. Obviously the focus of the books are quite different, free range kids is really more all about telling you to relax already and let your kids have some freedom and stop worrying about a bunch of things that are infinitesimally likely to happen (like stranger abductions), and DeBecker's book is more about stop worrying about things like stranger abductions because they distract you from worrying about things like kids playing with guns.

But whereas DeBecker gives lots of helpful advice for the real (rather than imagined, media hyped fear of Halloween candy) dangers, like acquaintance sexual abuse, Skenazy is entirely silent on these issues (again this may be because of the focus of the book, still I found it less helpful). Also, I found myself annoyed as she threw out historical examples of children in previous centuries "making it on their own" she gave examples of kids working to support the family at age six, kids being their younger children's care givers at ages as young as five, kids immigrating by themselves to America at the age of 11, I imagine that she was just trying to show how strong and capable kids can be, but mostly it just annoyed me, because those kids died a lot, and they suffered a lot, and though I do know my kids are capable of a lot, I don't find those situations even remotely idealistic.

Though I do like hearing that I'm not the worst mom in America for letting my kids walk a couple blocks to a friend's house, to the bus stop, or to play at the park. Because they can do it, it makes them feel strong and independent, and they really are safe.

Connie Gunderson says

This is probably the only parenting book that I would actually recommend. I usually fall down on the side of "if you're a smart and decent person, you already know what's best for your kid" which renders most parenting books useless. We read them to find support for what we already believe/know.

This book was a revelation for me, though. It posits that helicopter parenting, even that degree of helicopter parenting done by parents who think they're *not* helicopter parents, is unnecessary and unhealthful for everyone involved. It presents a reasonable discussion on the subject of why we don't allow our children the same freedoms our parents allowed us and then reasonably refutes the rationales of today's parents. Statistics are provided showing that although we are exposed to awful crime stories more today than our parents were, thanks to 24 hr news cycles and the internets, in fact these days are much safer than when we were kids.

Mostly I have found myself inspired to make a list of things to let Eddie do that we probably would've

avoided before reading this book. We've already sent him on his own to the neighbors' house to borrow sugar. Next, I will *gasp* allow him to play out front in the driveway/rock bed by himself, and a batch of self-prepared scrambled eggs is in his near future too.

The upshot is that kids feel a greater degree of self-confidence, independence, and ability when you let them do things by themselves. It's not hands-off parenting, it's parenting with a longer leash after you've given your kids the tools to avoid and extract themselves from trouble.

Katherine says

Very worthwhile (and quick) read. I thought I might be bored because I've read around this topic for awhile, but I actually still enjoyed it since it did a good job cutting the repetitive filler in most parenting books. It's targeted at a slightly older group, because I feel like I and most of my peers already had pretty gated childhoods and generally have only just gotten started on having kids, rather than people who already have tweens+. So while I felt that it was overall pretty relatable and the author shared her own irrational anxieties enough so that it wouldn't shame people who've already done a lot of helicoptering, I might not be the best judge of that. There are a lot of examples of restrictions that sound pretty obviously silly to me, but there are demonstrably a lot of people who think they are merely being sensible, so.

I think this book, along with *The Up Side of Down: Why Failing Well Is the Key to Success* and *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance* would be a good trio of books for most people interested in having kids. Especially before you actually have them and are in the grip of hormonally-driven anxiety.

A couple points in particular:

* Pointing out that TV/movies used to be much more restricted in content allowed to air: "once an image gets into that 'reptilian' part of the brain, not only can you not shake it, you also can't extricate it from all the other images and feelings jostling around in there...when our parents were raising good 'ol us, they didn't see this kind of tv."

* What I was trying to say that *Selfish Reasons to Have More Kids: Why Being a Great Parent is Less Work and More Fun Than You Think* really missed discussing: "Bad things happens to children of good parents. This is so hard to accept--harsh, fickle fate is so hard to accept in an age when we believe we can control everything--that we cast desperately about for someone to blame." + "When it became so rare for children to die, it became absolutely unacceptable for them to die. And even though it was unlikely, now you had to worry: Maybe they will."

The bulk of the book consists of these 14 commandments:

1. Know when to worry: stats indicate that most things you might worry about are still a lot less likely than getting hurt in a car accident.
2. Turn off the news: news is designed to draw your interest by stoking your fear and leads to your brain having a falsely negative sense of the world is like.
3. Avoid experts: you don't need to get that specific or dogmatic about how you're raising your kids; parenting is not a lab procedure with only one right method.
4. Boycott baby knee pads: remember that a lot of people are just trying to sell you baby stuff.
5. Don't think like a lawyer: don't just always envision the worst case scenario; consider the most likely scenario instead.
6. Ignore the blamers: ignore the pressure from other parents.

7. Eat chocolate: there hasn't actually ever been kids harmed by malicious neighbors on Halloween.
8. Study history: take note of how we used to consider people competent at many more tasks at much younger ages, and it's not possible that humans have changed all that much developmentally since then.
9. Be worldly: consider how other modern-day cultures have a lot of different assumptions and practices for children's safety.
10. Get braver: let go of trying to always be in control, since it won't really help prevent the bad things you're trying to avoid anyway.
11. Relax: not every little thing you do has that much impact on your child's development
12. Fail!: it's actually ok and good for kids to experience failure
13. Lock them out: let your kids have lots of play time
14. Listen to your kids: they probably would actually be really excited to be able learn to be more independent

Then the last section is kind of like an appendix of common fears and what the data on them is like.

Risks and fear:

- * "the impossible obsession of our era: total safety for our children every second of every day. The idea that we should provide it, and actually could provide it."
- * "She also thinks that, as a mom, she was doing the only rational, caring thing: making sure her ten-year-old was supervised every second, every place, every day by a preapproved adult."
- * "a lot of parents today are really bad at assessing risk. They see no difference between letting their children walk to school and letting them walk through a firing range."
- * "Any risk is seen as too much risk. A crazy, not-to-be-taken, see-you-on-the-local-news risk. And the only thing these parents don't seem to realize is that the greatest risk of all just might be trying to raise a child who never encounters any risks."
- * "the risk is so small, it's almost impossible to guard against. Just like it's almost impossible to guard against the possibility of being hit by an asteroid."
- * "when parents say, 'I'd love to let my kids have the same kind of childhood I had, but times have changed,' they're not making a rational argument. Times have not changed."
- * "The idea is that if you're worrying, then you're doing the right thing...Worrying is like a demonstration to yourself that you're being responsible."
- * "If you can make peace with the idea that we cannot control everything that happens in life, you will feel less personally responsible for every breath your child takes, and you will be able to breathe easier too."
- * "you don't have to live in fear, you don't have to feel you have to lock your children in a room...talk to them about how to handle themselves confidently, among people they know and people they don't."
- * "Children just used to be seen as a part of life...They were something you had, not something that defined you. Now? They're like a publicly available report cards, documenting all our parental success and failures. They embody our beliefs and who we are."

Independence for kids:

- * "The catch phrase is self-mastery, and you'll note that this term and self-confidence and self-esteem all start with self, not parent-assisted."
- * "We are not relating to our kids as kids. We are relating to them as complicated cakes we have been given to make, and if we don't follow the recipe exactly--a recipe given to us in painstaking detail by an expert chef angling for a TV baking show--the whole thing will collapse."
- * "the constant refrain of 'Get a grown-up! Let a grownup!' reinforces the whole idea that, rather than trying to learn any kind of real-world skill, kids should sit back and leave it all up to the adults."
- * "There is an idea in the air that somehow, if we just involve ourselves enough in our children's lives and think ahead and make a lot of plans and decisions, our children will be able to sail through their days, happy

and successful."

* "The assumption behind constant availability is that there are problems facing your child that must be solved, immediately, by you. The assumption behind that assumption is that you, the parent, are capable of solving all problems...that your child is helpless without you. So if you don't solve each and every problem, he's sunk, and you haven't done your job."

Direct action to take:

* "If you seek parenting advice, first try asking an older parent you admire. She'll be thrilled, and her advice won't last 378 pages."

* "Walk through the baby safety department of a store with your oldest living relative asking, 'which of these things did you need?'"

* "One: believe in her daughter's good judgment. Two: believe in the odds...And three: believe in herself. As a mom, she has undoubtedly given her girl some lessons about life and safety. She must believe she has had some effect."

* "from now on, whenever anyone asks, 'How could you possibly let your child get around on his own? Wouldn't you feel terrible if something happened?' you respond, 'How could you possibly let your kids get in the care with you? Wouldn't you feel awful if they were in a crash?'"

* "When you tell your children not to talk to a stranger, you are effectively removing hundreds of good people in the area who could be helping them. Instead, Evans teaches the kids that 1. Most adults are good, 2. There are a few bad ones. 3. Most normal adults don't drive up and ask for help. 4. If they do, or if they bother you in any other way, you can ask any other nearby adult for help. And again, if you need to, scream, hit, and run"

* "tell your kids they can talk to strangers. They can ask for help from strangers. What they should never do is go off with strangers."

Rachel says

I have been following Lenore Skenazy's blog for a while now and was appalled by the recent story about the two kids who were picked up by police in suburban Baltimore because they were walking home alone from their neighborhood playground. The incident spurred Child Protective Services to investigate the parents for child neglect! And there have been countless other examples too. I finally read Skenazy's book and I'm so glad that I did. It was an easy, enjoyable read packed with reliable statistic and information along with so much wisdom and a lot of humor. The book has helped me put my worries and fears into perspective (the world is as safe today as it was when we were kids, if not more so!) and has validated the decisions that I have made to give my kids more freedom and independence. We let our 9-year-old stay home alone for short periods of time, we let him and our 5-year-old play outside in our front and back yards without adult supervision, and they both walk to & from school together (even though almost every other kid in our neighborhood is escorted or driven the 3 blocks by a parent). As summer approaches, I'm planning to loosen the reins even more and this book has given me the encouragement and validation to do so! Thank you, Lenore!

Jessica says

This is one of the laziest books I've ever read. I don't entirely blame Lenore Skenazy, as I suspect there was an editor or publicist urging her to finish while America still thought of her as "the worst mom" (because she

let her 9-year-old ride the NYC subway alone), but still, it makes this book a frustrating read!

I gave the book two stars instead of one because there were enough interesting anecdotes to keep me reading, but really, I was climbing the walls the entire time I read this. Let me start by saying that I wholeheartedly agree with the basic premise of the book (hence why I began reading it at all): that kids need independence during childhood. I want my daughter to do things herself. I want her to spend time with her imagination and the outdoors. I had hoped this book would give me practical tips for deciding when she's ready to take on specific new challenges. Is it ok, for example, for me to use the bathroom at a busy coffee shop while she (age 5) sits at our table alone? When will she be ready to walk to school alone? What are some of the intermediate steps that we can take to prepare her for then? That kind of stuff. Ms. Skenazy goes into this a bit in boxes at the end of each chapter, which present challenges for "free-range" parents, but the info is a little vague, especially when a parent wants to know what preexisting skills/ developmental signs to look for to ensure a child is ready to succeed at a new challenge.

What really drove me crazy, however, was that Ms. Skenazy went off on topics that she is ABSOLUTELY not qualified to pontificate on. I get that her focus is letting kids enjoy the freedoms of childhood, because the risk of death is really, really small. But avoiding death isn't actually the only focus of some of the movements that she picks on. Her arguments for the chemical and product industries really distressed me as an environmentalist, especially where she argued that we should trust big business for these reasons: "[M]ost companies really do not try to sell us deadly or defective products. Even if they have no corporate conscience whatsoever, doing wrong is still not worth it to them, because if they harm a single child, they'll have to recall millions of products. Or millions of us will join a class-action suit. Either way, that will hurt their bottom line." (page 29) This is what I mean by lazy. A perceptive editor would have read this paragraph and sent a redlined version back to Ms. Skenazy to rework for (at least) these reasons:

1. The issue for most environmentalists is not whether products are deadly or defective. It's whether they cause long-term health effects like cancer, autism, allergies, or reproductive harm. So what if our kids don't die if they end up sick and impotent?
2. Single instances of harm probably do not result in product recalls. A quiet settlement seems more likely. (Want to know more about this? Ask a lawyer at Public Citizen.)
3. Does she even know what "class action" means? The only way to have a class action composed of millions of class members is if the product actually harms millions of people.

One more example and then I'll stop (because I have about a million little scraps of paper in this book marking places where this book is just completely off base, and I could go on and on). On page 56, Ms. Skenazy argues that our culture needs to stop blaming victims' parents for the bad things that happen to their children. But by p. 162, when blaming victims actually gives some facial support to the argument she wants to make, she argues that kids aren't really at risk from sexual predators online, unless they engage in communication online with a lot of people they don't know or employ the use of "sexy names," among other behaviors. Then, Ms. Skenazy writes, "They are, in short, the online versions of the offline provocative kids most of us are familiar with. (And if you're not, kindly observe 90 percent of the characters on Gossip Girl.)" In other words, it's the bad girl's fault if she's targeted by sexual predators online -- and we are talking about girls (children) here! It's as if Ms. Skenazy expects all her readers to nod their heads, thinking "my child would never do that," and let the "bad girls" (who are someone's children after all) take the blame for the horrifying sexual abuse of children that begins online.

Not to mention that she's completely flip! And uses exclamation marks in exceedingly annoying frequency!

To quote the part of the book that I did wholeheartedly agree with: "Arghhhh."

Lynn says

Many years ago when my sister and her 2 kids and I and my two kids went to a very small town in Nova Scotia, my sister gave her son money and told him to go to the local store and buy some rolls for sandwiches. He was about 7 years old. The store was maybe a 5 minute walk away. Yet for a boy raised right outside of Washington DC this was major -- he went and came back all proud of his adventure and we all thought isn't that great! Mind you the small town was on an island and the ferry left port once every hour. Since there was one road ... it wasn't like he could have gotten lost! Yet sometimes safe adventures are hard to come by and that is what the book "Free-Range Kids" is all about.

Lenore was labelled the "America's Worst Mom" when she let her 9 year old take the subway back from a shopping trip. The boy had grown up in New York, he had been on subways his whole life and he started in a location that was close to a subway stop. They had agreed and spoken about the whole process and he felt confident that he could do it. So she let him. Then as a journalist she wrote about this experience. How wonderful her son felt about a successful mission and how nervous she was about the trip. The day it was printed -- the phone calls started.

Lenore seems to be a careful woman: she has statistics from "Crimes Against Children Research Center" and has done fairly intensive statistic searches at the US Department of Justice. She can tell us exactly how many documented instances of Halloween poisoning there are by strangers ... zero documented cases. Though she does mention one instance of a 5 year old getting into his uncles heroin and dying. So the parents who didn't want the uncle to get into trouble sprinkled heroin on the rest of the Halloween candy. Also a father gave his son poison in a Pixie Stick thinking that since there were SO many crazy people out there on Halloween -- it would just look like any other Halloween homicide.

Lenore also raises many questions about the necessity of having knee pads for baby, helmets for toddlers learning to walk, and some of the other "safety" equipment that parents of infants and toddlers are convinced that they need.

This is a great book that I found really funny at times. She likes to point out just how crazy our society is and how we can take courage and change our little part of the world.

David says

This is the woman who wrote an article about letting her then-9-year old ride the NY subway alone, and got a ton of blowback about her being a horrible mom. She must have an entrepreneurial soul, as she turned this potentially devastating incident into a platform for a blog, a website, a regular column, many TV appearances, and this book. Well played, ma'am!

General thesis is that things are not as dangerous as you fear, that kids need to be allowed to have the same freedoms we had when young to roam around and discover on their own, and that media-driven hysteria fuels our exaggerated perceptions of risk.

For the most part, I really liked it -- funny, reasonable, and balanced. By "balanced" I mean that her overall take is certainly one-sided, advocating that you lighten up and quit worrying yourself and your kids to death, but she does sensibly acknowledge that some safety tips are important, empirically supported, and well worth it. Yes, outlawing "tag" at recess because some kid some time might fall and get a skinned knee is ridiculous, but the "Back to Sleep" campaign to reduce SIDS worked and saved many infants' lives. Baby knee pads for crawlers and toilet lid locks are overkill, but keeping kids from swimming in backyard pools unattended is a sensible way to reduce drowning risk. Eating lead paint really is bad for kids' development. And so on.....

Two minor quibbles about her extensive use of stats in this book:

(a) she repeatedly points out that indicators of safety are much improved in the past generation -- fewer kids being murdered, etc. Gregg Easterbrook's book *The Progress Paradox* was an interesting discussion of how come people are often unaware of positive social trends like this, and I'm sympathetic to her overall point, but she never acknowledges that to a nervous parent this data point could be taken to mean the opposite of her thesis. She deploys improved safety status to mean that you shouldn't worry excessively about small and receding risks, but it would be just as logical to look at (i) increased worry wart-ism and (b) decreased crime against kids, and conclude that the worriers are right -- telling kids not to talk to strangers and never letting them walk anywhere alone until they're 25 and.....is working! It's made them safer than in our day.

(b) she's all numerator and no denominator. Whenever discussing something she doesn't think you should worry about, she stresses the small absolute number of kids who died that way and puts it in context of how many kids there are, not how many engaged in that activity. Since I was at an aquarium with my family yesterday I'll call this the "sharks aren't so bad after all" syndrome. Shark apologists like to point out that they don't kill that many people each year, but how many people are actually swimming near sharks for how much total time? I doubt russian roulette kills as many people as car crashes each year, but that doesn't mean russian roulette is a safer activity than driving.

Terri says

I will start by saying that I rarely read "self-help" books. In this way I can agree with Skenazy. I think we should trust our own instincts and the advice of close friends and family over books by strangers.

I can agree with her in a few other ways. I agree with her about the crazy law suits. We all should take responsibility for our own actions. I also agree with her that children need responsibilities and freedom, but I think the freedom should come age appropriately. Children can babysit other people's kids, but not until at least age 11 or 12. Children can be left home alone, but not until age 10. So I agree, but disagree.

However even when I agreed with her, she just annoyed me. She tells us not to blame each other as parents and then she spends an entire book mocking other parents. The whole book felt like a rant as she tried to defend her own lifestyle and I got tired of "listening" to her.

She compares us to 3rd world countries and tells a story about people in southeast asia who think kids in strollers must be crippled. Strollers are useful things. They helped me get my kids places easily, quickly, and

(YES!) safely.

What is really so wrong with trying to keep kids safe? We definitely shouldn't go overboard, but frankly I don't know any parent who acts as crazed as the "typical" parents she kept talking about.

One of her favorite statistics is that children are just as safe now as they were in the 70s. Is it possible that this could be because we are more safety conscious?

I think I'll go back to not reading "self-help" books.

Skylar Burris says

This is the book to read if you're tired of worrying about every little thing you may be doing wrong as a parent, or if you're tired of people looking at you as if you were a horrible mom because you are letting your five-year-old daughter hang upside down barefoot from the monkey bars (not naming any names, but it might have been my daughter, who, by the way, has neither fallen nor contracted ringworm--yet, anyway).

I don't agree with all of the author's parenting advice, and I wouldn't have made some of the same choices as some of the parents she lauds, but I agree with the gist of her philosophy: out of unfounded (largely media-generated) fears, parents are (on average) overprotecting the current generation of children, giving them too little space to roam (particularly outdoors), too many structured activities, not enough unstructured free time to engage in creative play and learn to amuse themselves, and too little freedom to learn to make their own responsible decisions.

The book is a very easy read because the author is quite funny and the topics she skewers are familiar to every mother. Afraid your baby is getting too much BP from his plastic bottle? Think your three-year-old will die if you give him a little cough syrup? Afraid that if breastfeeding doesn't work out for you, your baby's IQ will drop a few points? Certain if you allow your 9 year old to walk to school without you, he'll be nabbed? Pregnant and wondering how you could ever keep the 50-page What to Expect While You Are Expecting healthy diet? Then this book is for you.

The parenting advice is limited; the book primarily consists of encouragement: don't be so afraid. You're not going to screw up your kid. Really. On the other hand, she sort of feeds a fear that some instinctively "free range" parents might not have had before: any second, someone might call CPS on you for letting your kid do the normal kid things you did as a kid at the same age. At the very least, you'll be judged harshly, and the neighborhood moms won't let their kids play with yours. So she rails against creating fear, but not without (perhaps inadvertently) potentially creating a few fears of her own. She rails against judgmental moms, while at the same time judging the overprotective, over-scheduling variety of mom.

I laughed QUITE a bit during the first half of the book, but maybe the humor just wore old after that; the second half did not give me quite so many chuckles.

Lori says

Loved this book! It's one of the best parenting books I've read. It's not a "to-do" list of what every should do, but a discussion of real issues, real risks, and real options. Lenore does a great job of presenting subjects to think about and then documents her research.

Our children are much too capable to be kept under constant supervision. We should teach them skills and then give them opportunities to interact with the world on their own.

Wendy says

"[In the olden days] children were expected to rise to the adulthood all around them, not stew in adorable incompetence."

This is the thesis behind Lenore Skenazy's chatty book, which grew out of a column she wrote about how she let her 9 year old son ride the subway alone, and was then castigated for being an "irresponsible parent" on national TV. She castigates over-protection and argues for raising competent kids with the skills and confidence to deal with the big "scary" real world instead of bubble-wrapping them. It's like reading a long, funny magazine article that shows why childhood is so much safer today than even just 20 years ago, why parents' fears of abduction, kidnapping, and murder of children are unfounded (statistically, if you WANTED your child abducted from a typical suburban neighborhood, you'd have to let him/her play outside unattended for 750,000 years. Know what we should be WAY WAY more terrified of? Car accident fatalities. But we drive our kids in cars more than ever. I suspect that any over-paranoid parent might feel a sense of relief reading this book as they realize how overblown our fears can be (we could be living in the 1850's instead. Or a non-first-world country). Or maybe they'll just feel a heightened sense of indignation towards the author--"A 9-year old on the subway?! Lock up the author!" For the record, I was 11 the first time I traveled overseas alone. I somehow managed to make my connection in Newark with some help by nice airport staff, and didn't even lose my passport, though it was a close call. The most traumatic thing that happened was when the German customs guy confiscated my apple. I learned a valuable lesson about the dangers of agricultural diseases. Oh, and self-confidence I guess, too.

Julie Ekkers says

I came to this book without knowing not only that there was someone who had let her nine-year-old ride the New York subway by himself, but also that that someone was the author of this book. So, I was unfamiliar with the author's blog and her other journalism. I think her humor, while often funny, probably works better in those shorter forms than in this longer piece. There are a few chapters late in the book where I felt she was stretching her point a bit. Still, I really enjoyed this book. It offers some refreshing perspective and a call for more perspective in parenting. I think this is a valuable message for those who are open to receiving it, as I was. I tend to be anxious (it is difficult not to be given what is reported in the news), but I also very much want to raise children who are confident and not themselves anxious. This book presents some facts and thoughts that I hope will assist me in better assessing what's really a risk to my children, and in so doing, help me let them go so they both fail on their own, and succeed on their own.

Lauren says

Eh. I tried reading this for book club, but couldn't bring myself to get more than a quarter of the way through it. I didn't think she was that funny (common praise is that she's hilarious). And I didn't find her advice compelling or relevant. I DO think of myself as a Type A, anxious parent, but I'm not anxious about the kinds of things she dismisses (kidnappings and razor blades in Halloween candy). And I found her casual dismissal of what I'd call conscientious, thoughtful parenting to be irritating. For example, she criticizes a particular parenting book for advising parents to look at a child's piece of art and comment on it without passing judgement. Instead of saying, "Nice job. That's beautiful," you might say, "I see you chose red to make thick lines and blue for the thin lines. Tell me more." I happen to like advice like that... I find it liberating and eye-opening, not unnatural and constraining.

So, eh.

That said, this book DID inspire what ended up being a thought-provoking and anxiety-inducing (for me) discussion with my usual book club. The moms of older daughters in particular inspired me to think differently about my daughter and the risks she faces in the world as she gets older...
