

Is Lack of Play the Reason Kids are Depressed?

Last week [we discussed](#) the words of psychologist Jean Twenge, who declared that the rise of depression and anxiety in Americans is a result of communal and familial decline, as well as an intensified focus on money, fame, and image.

While these are logical and likely culprits, Dr. Peter Gray believes there is another factor behind American depression, particularly the depression which affects children. That factor is a lack of play. As Gray observes in [Quartz](#):

“Playing—unstructured time, with rules set by the kids (no adults acting as referee)—is how kids learn independence, problem-solving, social cues, and bravery. Now, parents jump in to solve the playground kerfuffle, spot with eagle eyes the dangers of tall trees and steep hills, and fail to let kids have any independence for fear they will be abducted or hit by a car.

‘Where do children learn to control their own lives? When adults aren’t around to do it for you,’ he said.

‘If you don’t have the opportunity to experience life on your own, to deal with the stressors of life, to learn in this context of play where you are free to fail, the world is a scary place,’ he says.”

Anytime we discuss the lack of play issue at Intellectual Takeout, our fans overwhelmingly agree that this is a real problem in modern America. Many of the older generation, in recalling their own carefree childhood play experiences, are quick to wish the same for their children or grandchildren.

But there is a major difference between those days and today.

The older generations were able to play in the backyard and throughout the neighborhood because many of them had a parent at home. Not an overseeing, hovering parent ready to swoop in at the sign of a scratch, but an adult who encouraged children to get out of the house and was a responsible and wise resource in the event of real trouble. The few children who didn't have a parent at home could run with the herd and still be safe because the eyes of so many other parents were upon him.

It's all well and good to say that children need more freedom and opportunities to play, but can this really happen in a society where both parents go to work and bring home a paycheck?

Image Credit: Old Picture of the Day