

Why Kids Today Show Adults So Little Respect

In a [recent article](#) for *The Washington Post*, author Meredith Hale shares some rather humiliating experiences she recently endured at the hands of her daughter's 8-year-old friends. The first was being ordered to eat an old, crusty fragment of bagel picked up from the floor. The second was being intentionally slapped in the rear.

Hale implies that these incidents were done in fun and that these young miscreants are generally nice kids. The behavior, however, bothered her, particularly once she realized that her own children seemed disrespectful of adults when they called them by their first names:

"I realize this name game may sound petty, but I'm starting to wonder if this is where it all begins. We've struggled – along with so many parents I know – with what to instruct our kids to call the grown-ups in their lives. Calling them by their first names feels inappropriate, but 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' seems stiff and outdated. I don't remember this being an issue as a kid. Growing up, I didn't even know my friends' parents had first names. There was a line between kids and adults that we all inherently understood. Moms and dads inhabited adult spaces, like living rooms and kitchen tables, discussing things that were too important (and boring) to be interrupted. We kids sought out other, more exotic spaces to claim as our own – dusty basements, clubhouses erected in half-filled closets, unexplored creeks winding through back corners of neighborhoods. When we left these Narnia-like domains to cross back into the adult realm, we dusted off our manners and proper behavior. Because otherwise we might not be invited back."

Hale continues by voicing her perplexity:

“I don’t know why these boundaries seem to have eroded. I wonder sometimes what the consequences will be.”

There are numerous possibilities that may answer Hale’s head-scratching moment, but I can’t help but wonder if the primary reason is because adults have eroded these boundaries themselves.

Think about it for a moment. While it was commonplace during Hale’s formative years for kids to run off and play on their own, such is no longer the case. As my colleague Kerry McDonald [notes](#), free, independent play by children dropped by 25 percent in the generation born just before the millennium. In its place, pre-planned, structured activities have blossomed.

These structured activities have an adult ever-present, hovering in the background to ensure that no one gets hurt or does anything unacceptable. As such, adults are no longer a distant being to whom a child encounters only in dire circumstances, but a familiar figure. And as we’ve all been told, it is familiarity which breeds contempt.

American culture has embraced the idea of structured, adult-supervised play for the purpose of promoting child well-being. But are we really promoting child well-being when we place them on an equal pedestal with the authorities in their lives?

It’s a question which deserves some careful consideration.

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