

Why COVID Kids May Grow Up To Be Libertarians

The Coronavirus crisis hit children as hard as any other segment of the population. All familiar routines were suddenly ripped away from them. Thousands are still doing school online. Many state mask mandates include young children.

For children old enough to remember it in the future, the year of Coronavirus, will be a significant event in their childhoods. They will probably tell their own children and grandchildren stories about what it was like to live through this time.

But how will they look back on this crisis when they reach adulthood? And how will it shape their worldview?

For adults, the debate about handling the pandemic has been highly politicized for some time. However, we are now moving into a phase of the reopening where different standards about what is allowed and what isn't will be obvious even to children.

For example, last week a kind friend wanted to organize a picnic for my three small children. She prepared little sandwiches and lots of fun snacks, yet, when we arrived at our local park a guard approached us to tell us we couldn't bring food in. This is normally allowed, but it is forbidden during COVID-19 because eating requires removing one's mask. My children burst into tears. My friend and I tried – in vain – to convince them that having a picnic in the living room is also fun.

The worst part of this situation, however, is that we constantly walk by restaurants in our neighborhood that are open for business – both with indoor and outdoor seating. What's the difference between us having a picnic in the park

and buying an ice cream cone and eating it on the restaurant terrace? Why is one a health hazard and not the other? I was at a loss to explain this discrepancy to my children. It is simply unfair. As young as they are, my kids intuit that.

Children have a deep-rooted sense of fairness. Peter Gray, a professor of psychology, [writes](#) in *Psychology Today* that children grasp early on that fairness is necessary in order to play with each other.

Anyone who has spent much time observing children play independently of adult control knows that they are very concerned with fairness. 'That's not fair' is among the most common phrases you will hear...

There is a simple reason why play must be fair. The fairness doesn't come from some highfalutin moral philosophy nor from deep-seated altruism. Children are neither philosophers nor angels. ... Fairness comes from the simple reality that play with others is only possible if it is fair.

American children are seeing that their schools are still closed, but that other types of gatherings are allowed. Some activities are permitted while others – despite being essentially the same thing – are forbidden. Depending on their age, these observations will impact them deeply. Kids realize this is unfair. Not everyone is playing by the same rules.

Future research will likely tell us a great deal about which government imposed restrictions actually combatted the virus and which were pointless. We will also have a much better understanding of the side effects of these measures. Adults who were children during this pandemic will likely follow these developments with great interest.

Articles about the impact of the pandemic on children tend to focus on the education they have lost due to school closures. But it is also worth noting that children are witnessing repeated violations of their innate sense of fairness. This

may well leave them with a sense of mistrust towards institutions and authorities. Is COVID-19 going to raise up a generation of libertarians?

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