

The Wackiest Parenting Stories of 2021

In a crazy year, some stories were crazier than others when it came to kids, parents, worrywarts, scolds—and everything besides COVID-19, which we give a blessed rest in this list!

No. 1: WHY CAN'T YOU BE GOOD LIKE ME?

A Beaverton, Oregon, man screamed at a lady for leaving her kid in the car while she ran into the grocery for two items. Her irresponsibility was hurting his work! Here he was, minding his own business, stealing her car, when he noticed the baby and had to bring him back. What a waste of time! On the upside, at least that gave the guy a chance to tell the mom what a lowlife she was before he sped off again—in her car.

No. 2: WE'LL LEAVE A LIGHT ON (IN YOUR CELL)

Shaina Bell of Youngstown, Ohio, was arrested for leaving her kids, 10 and 2, in a motel room while she worked her evening shift at a pizza shop. Cops tipped off to this struggling family's criminal activity booked mom into jail on two counts of criminal child endangerment. Being in a cell would certainly help her supervise her kids! Surprise happy ending: When the story got out, a GoFundMe raised \$165,000 to help the Bell family.

No. 3: THE SCHOOL PICKUP-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

When 10-year-old Braylin Harvey was picked up a full seven minutes late from a Chicago public school, the school reported his mom, JaNay Dodson, to the Department of Child and Family Services. The principal's email to Dodson said, "I am empathetic to the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities, however, all school employees are ... required

to follow CPS protocols.” Dolores Umbridge couldn’t have said it better!

No. 4: NO GLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS KID

Hazmat teams rushed to New Jersey’s Haddon Township High School in January after a sophomore brought a quarter-size piece of Fiestaware—the colorful Depression-era plates—to science class. He wanted to see if the red color, once made with uranium oxide, was radioactive. His teacher considered it a learning opportunity. An administrator considered it a biohazard and evacuated the school, even though if you search for “Fiestaware radioactive,” as I did, you will find an article on ScienceNotes.org saying, “There is no record of anyone ever becoming sick from manufacturing or using radioactive Fiestaware.”

No. 5: HOW DARE THOSE BOYS PLAY OUTSIDE?

Nevada doctor Daniel Hansen was at work when his sons, 8 and 10, asked their mom if they could play down their dead-end street. Mom said yes, and off they went—until a neighbor called 911 to report two unsupervised children. Firefighters raced over to ... sheepishly escort them home. The firemen apologized, then added they would be reporting the family to law enforcement.

Dr. Hansen’s mom, Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen, needed no further prodding to co-sponsor Let Grow’s “Reasonable Childhood Independence” bill in the Nevada State Legislature. The law ensures that parents who let their kids do reasonable things like play outside cannot be charged with neglect unless they put the kids in obvious and likely danger.

The bill passed in the Nevada House with bipartisan support, stalling in the senate. But here’s the GOOD news:

This year, Oklahoma and Texas became the second and third states to follow the lead of Utah, which passed the country’s

first “Free-Range Parenting” law in 2018. Now one-tenth of American kids live where they are guaranteed the right to “Reasonable Childhood Independence.”

This coming year Let Grow, the childhood independence-promoting nonprofit I run, hopes to pass similar bills in Colorado, Nebraska and South Carolina.

Stay tuned and wish us luck—2022 could be a much better year for free-range kids!

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