

# Summer Time Is for Wasting

With the lazy, hazy days of you-know-what upon us, should you worry about your kids goofing off? Being idle? Spending tons of time making sculptures out of wet, squished Kleenex (toilet paper works, too!) or any other odd hobbies they may develop?

Sure! Worry all you want—if you think that who you are in life is a direct result of your not having wasted even a single minute as a kid.

Most of us just aren't that efficient (she wrote, leaving her computer to get a cup of coffee and then spending 10 minutes scrolling through her emails). (Now 20 minutes.)

All of us spent some of our childhood practicing a skill of truly limited market value, often, for some reason, involving knuckles. Would we be five steps ahead in life if we'd buckled down and read more Balzac?

Probably not. Because wasted time only looks wasted through the distorting lens of fear.

Berkeley history professor Paula Fass, author of *The End of American Childhood*, explains it this way:

*It actually wasn't until the 20th century that people started thinking in terms of 'developmental milestones.' This is the idea that by age 3 a kid can start to share, and 5-year-olds should understand lying, and at 10 kids start to question parental authority (a stage that lasts another 60 years).*

These milestones—flogged in books, magazines and mommy groups—were responsible for a whole new worry: IS MY KID ON TRACK? And then, because making parents worry is our culture's favorite pastime, more and more aspects of childhood started getting milestoned: By three they should be enrolled in T-ball! Reading at five! Coding by 10! And if your kid wasn't

hitting those marks?

All bets were off.

That's the fear.

Meandering off those rigid tracks started looking like falling off a cliff, when actually it's just meandering. And meandering is not just normal, it's GOOD.

In the extremely reassuring book *Range: How Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, author David Epstein says that when parents try to get kids to do something early, like learn their letters, any advantage usually disappears in a year or two. And in the meantime, those super-focused, parent-pushed kids have been missing the chance to discover other interests or even talents. (See knuckle tricks, above.)

Now with summer upon us, it is a Herculean task to fill kids' days with "enriching" activities. It takes all OUR time to fill all THEIR time. So...

Don't. Wasting some free time is healthy. Very few of us can do our jobs without embarrassingly long breaks to call our sister, surf the web, eat a muffin, or—now that we're working from home—go ahead and *bake* the muffins.

So, yes, your child is wasting time. Your friendly author is wasting time. (And I never want to eat another muffin AGAIN.)

Set aside some daily time for your kids to go outside: "From one to four you've got to be out of the house." Set aside some time for them to do chores: "Tuesday and Friday are your dishes and dusting days, David." But then set some time aside for you to chill while your kids do whatever interests them, on their own. You have to trust that kids can be unproductive and still have a bright future.

Letting your kids waste some time shows them you believe in them even if they aren't hitting every milestone and

“achieving” every second. That’s not wasted time. Let’s call it “I trust you” time. Or “I sure spent a lot of July just running through the sprinkler and here I am today” time.

Or maybe just use the time-honored term: “summer” time.

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