

Parents, You Can Sit This One Out

The website *Scary Mommy* is always on top of parenting trends, and its latest discovery is “sittervising.” The not-exactly-groundbreaking idea is for a parent to SIT while their kid plays, rather than feeling obligated to jump in and toss the ball, be the snowman, or praise every single shovelful of sand the child gets to the pail.

Yes, it’s too bad that there needs to be a word legitimizing this already totally legit behavior, but golly, we’re glad there is! Just as “free-range parenting” became the name for a whole bunch of practices encouraging independence (OK, so I popularized it), “sittervising” gives tired, trusting parents a way of explaining their decision to intervene a little less. It’s not laziness. It’s not neglect. It’s a belief that kids can and should spend some time figuring out how to have fun without dragooning an adult.

The term was coined by *Busy Toddler* blogger Susie Allison, and here are a few of her tips that are liberating for both parent and child:

Don’t Butt In! Let sleeping dogs lie, and let playing toddlers play! If your child makes the decision to play alone, do not interrupt them. It’s tempting to compliment their beautiful artwork, fix their wobbling tower, or ask a question. Resist the urge. Give them a chance to develop skills on their own, and you can join them later.

Another great Allison adage?

Stay Strong! Your child may ask you to join in before independent playtime is over. It’s hard to refuse their big begging eyes and constant requests, but you’ll be glad you

did in the end. Eventually, your child will understand the routine and know that you'll be available soon.

In many cultures around the world, parents don't play with their kids at all. Getting down on all fours to be a horsey is considered as strange as getting down on all fours to lap your water from a bowl.

Sitting rather than running/assisting/joining is the "baby step" a lot of parents are always asking me to suggest. It seems great for folks with the very young kids that still do need supervision. I love that Allison specifically says to *resist the urge* to engage your child every moment or celebrate everything they do. Those are hard urges to ignore, especially when indulging them seems like what good parents *ought* to be doing all the time—and enjoying.

Unpopular Truth: It is hard to enjoy being the horsey.

Unpopular Truth No. 2: You can love your child very, very much and still be bored at the park.

Unpopular Truth No. 3: Reading a book or even—dare we say it—*looking at your phone* from time to time is not a crime.

So, let's hear it for a new word that gives parents a way to reframe less-than-constant interaction as something other than shameful laziness!

I'd high-five Allison for this, but I'm betting she has an internal locus of control that gives her a sense of agency and self-direction without requiring the constant approval of others.

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