

The Strangest Thing About 'Stranger Things'

If you watch *Stranger Things* with your kids, there's a good chance they spend some of the time crying. Not because the monsters are so scary, but because the kids are so free. It's like monkeys at the zoo watching a Jane Goodall documentary.

In pretty much every episode, Will, Max, Dustin, Lucas, El, and Mike hop on their bikes, and it's never to go to Kumon or lacrosse practice. They're off on adventures. And when they need help to battle a big, slimy thing that has no face but still manages to eat people, they depend on one another's bravery, brains and loyalty.

What kind of parent allows that?

Well, *Stranger Things* is set in the '80s, and back then, pretty much all American parents gave their kids some free, unsupervised time. Each precious second was not claimed by homework or some "enriching" adult-led activity—which is why that childhood WAS so enriching.

We forget all the lessons kids learn when an adult isn't busy teaching them something. Friends, failure, fear—all those are teachers, too. Memorable ones.

But today, we think of kids as in danger anytime they're not with an adult. We worry they'll be hurt or, God forbid, fall behind. And so [a recent survey of 2,500 Americans](#) across the geographic and income spectrum found that today's parents don't think their kids should do almost anything on their own—walk to school, ride their bikes to a friend's house or stay home alone—till age 12.

Twelve. That's middle school! Raise your hand if you started walking to school in elementary school. Now raise your hand if

your crossing guard was not an adult in uniform, but a kid with a sash. Now raise your hand AGAIN if you ended up marrying yours.

Hmm. Mine seems to be the only hand still up. (Weird but true. Several years into our marriage we realized my husband had been the guard at my corner when he was in sixth grade, and I was in first. Guess I fell for a man in uniform.)

OK, so now 12 is the age of independence—but it's also the age that parents believe their kids should get a phone. Coincidence? Maybe. But it sure seems like parents don't think their kids should go out into the world—or even their own neighborhood—until they are trackable.

Which means that kids are sort of independent ... but also sort of not. Because now kids have a way to instantly contact their parents, and parents have a way to constantly monitor their kids. The older generation is connected to the younger in a way that was never previously possible.

I realize that cellphones are now as normal a part of growing up as bikes once were. I gave my kids phones. But once upon a time, knowing that you were on your own, free, responsible and trusted, was a big step in growing up. You had to depend on yourself and your crew. Your parents had to believe in you, too. They proved it by letting you go.

It's not strange to me that [kids are feeling more anxious and depressed these days](#), when there's simply no way for them to ride around their ever-growing world without their parents, in a way, always riding with them.

—

COPYRIGHT 2022 CREATORS.COM

Image Credit: Giphy