Check for updates

Volume 36, Number 1 | 2023

Society for Research in Child Development

Social Policy Report

The Unintended Consequences of "Lack of Supervision" Child Neglect Laws: How Developmental Science Can Inform Policies about Childhood Independence and Child Protection

Rachel M. Flynn, Department of Child & Adolescent Development, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, USA

Nicholas J. Shaman, Department of Psychology, University of Houston—Clear Lake, Houston, Texas, USA

Diane L. Redleaf, Principal, Family Defense Consulting, LLC, Oak Park, Illinois, USA

ABSTRACT

Policies and programs designed to serve children and families are sometimes misaligned with developmental science research. Broad child neglect reporting laws, first adopted by the United States in 1974, have led to families being prosecuted by child protection authorities for allowing children to participate in everyday age-appropriate activities unsupervised. In this report we describe the challenges of defining child neglect and outline the current landscape of neglect laws in the United States. We then provide a broad overview of some of the developmental milestones children need to reach to participate in unsupervised activities and the benefits of independent activities on child development. Children can often accomplish tasks at a much younger age than law, parents, and caregivers in the U.S. believe. We then turn to the literature from across the world and argue that culture, not innate ability, drives much of the variation in the age at which children can do things on their own. Finally, we make recommendations to parents, caregivers, legislators, advocates, and developmental scientists to better align practice with research. This is a social justice issue that should resonate across party, racial, and class lines. Developmental scientists are needed as advocates and advisors on policies impacting children and families, especially child neglect laws.

Keywords

child protection, childhood independence, supervisory neglect

Correspondence

Diane L. Redleaf (familydefenseconsulting@gmail.com)

Social Policy Report

Volume 36, Number 1 | 2023
ISSN 1075-7031

Social Policy Report
is published three times a year
by the Society for Research in
Child Development.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Lead Editor
Ellen Wartella, PhD
ellen-wartella@northwestern.edu

Associate Editor
Fashina Aladé, PhD
alade@u.northwestern.edu

Editorial Board
P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, PhD
Sandra Waxman, PhD
David Figlio, PhD
Craig Garfield, MD
Neil Jordan, PhD
Terri Sabol, PhD
David Uttal, PhD
Diane Schanzenbach, PhD
Dedre Gentner, PhD
Matthew M. Davis, MD
Amelie Petitclerc, PhD
Rachel Flynn, PhD
Onnie Rogers, PhD

SRCD Policy Staff
Lindsay Trammell

Manager of Publications
Melissa Lutchkus

FROM THE EDITOR

In this *Social Policy Report*, authors Rachel Flynn, Nicholas Shaman, and Diane Redleaf examine both U.S. and international policies regarding child neglect laws and the various definitions of what constitute child neglect, parental supervisory neglect, and child protection. Through this comprehensive review, they draw our attention to the fact that more stringent child neglect laws, such as those common in most U.S. states, may in fact be undermining children's development.

Since the adoption of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 by the U.S. Congress, there has been the adoption of the notion that children (especially those under 12) must be constantly supervised by adults, even during free play, otherwise they can be deemed neglected and their parents subject to punitive consequences such as by Child Protection Services (CPS). The authors explain that each year more than 7 million children are reported to CPS hotlines in the U.S. "These hotline calls result in two million cases opened for investigation or a service response in the United States, with approximately 620,000 cases deemed to be "substantiated" (i.e., cases in which, upon investigation, some form of abuse or neglect is deemed to have occurred). Sixty percent of these cases concern "neglect only" cases (i.e., the cases present no claim of physical or sexual abuse)." As the authors go on to note, it is difficult to know how severe these cases are and how many fall into the category of supervisory neglect for several reasons: (1) state laws, policies, and reports do not distinguish by type of neglect (e.g. emotional, medical, supervisory), (2) there is little agreement on the definition of supervisory neglect since neglect refers to "omissions of care" rather than specific harmful behaviors toward children, and (3) "child neglect is multidimensional and context-dependent, and it presents differently based upon the age of the child."

The authors point out that the laws and policies concerning child neglect are often misaligned with what developmental scientists know about child development—namely, that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and that the milestones of development are highly child-, context-, and culturally-dependent. Many states include a general age limit for when children can be left unsupervised, but these age limits likely lead to the overinclusion of children who are developmentally ready for more independence and the underinclusion of those who are not. The authors argue that in almost all of the U.S. laws and policies governing supervisory neglect, there is inadequate attention to the physical, cognitive, and social developmental status of the children involved, and they go on to outline the developmental trajectories of independence across those three areas.

After a review of the developmental literature, the authors go on to review various cultural perspectives on what responsive parenting looks like, paying special attention to how Western culture differs from other international perspectives. They cite several examples from cross-cultural research that demonstrate cultural differences in how a society views the ability of children to act independently at different ages. For instance, in many African societies it is deemed appropriate for children as young as 5 to be caretakers of younger children, while U.S. middle class families would put the age of supervision at 10 or 12. The authors do not argue that any one cultural perspective is better than any other, but rather that the wide variations in child independence and beliefs about neglect can be used to inform Western practices and policies.

The authors then go on to discuss the benefits of independence. They note that children need to act independently for healthy developmental growth and that parenting behaviors have a significant influence on children's readiness for independence. Indeed, parents who underestimate their children's capacities may impede their development.

The authors conclude with a set of concrete and research-informed suggestions for parents and caregivers, legislators and advocates, and developmental scientists. For parents, they argue that it is important to pay attention to their child's developing physical, cognitive, and emotional skills and talk to them about what they feel capable of doing independently, such as walking to school. For legislators, they suggest looking at new laws enacted in Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah that have been amended to exclude from neglect laws children's independent activities, such as walking to school alone. Lastly, the authors call on developmental scientists to not only conduct more research on this topic but also to advance policy in the area and consult with nonpartisan advocacy agencies for coordination of policy activities.

This SPR offers a wide-ranging analysis of child neglect laws and practices covering both state and international policy standards. Most importantly, it points out how neglect of children's developmental trajectories and their need for independence has led to poorly-informed social policies that may be impeding children's healthy development.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

The Unintended Consequences of "Lack of Supervision" Child Neglect Laws: How Developmental Science Can Inform Policies about Childhood Independence and Child Protection

Policies and programs designed to serve children and families are built upon a general understanding of child development. Developmental research has tried to expand that understanding and determine the typical ages at which children acquire certain skills and capabilities, while at the same time incorporating individual differences and cultural variations in child development (Rogoff, 2003). Unfortunately, cultural norms, and therefore, laws and policies, are sometimes misaligned with the research evidence. This is particularly true for child protection law and policy, including the understanding of when children can and should be allowed to be unsupervised by adults in developmentally appropriate ways.

In recent decades in the United States, children's unsupervised activities, long seen as a routine and healthy part of child development, have been increasingly scrutinized and labeled as unsafe or inappropriate.

In recent decades in the United States, children's unsupervised activities, long seen as a routine and healthy part of child development, have been increasingly scrutinized and labeled as unsafe or inappropriate by law enforcement and CPS agencies (Pimentel, 2015). For example, broad child neglect reporting laws, first adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1974 (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 1974), have influenced the idea that children must be constantly supervised by adults, even during free play, because lack of supervision may lead to a member of the public calling a child neglect hotline (Pimentel, 2015; Redleaf, 2022; Rutherford, 2011). In turn, the fear of such calls may influence parents' decisions about what unsupervised activities they can or should allow (Pimentel, 2015; Redleaf, 2022). These changes have contributed to a cultural shift in the U.S. where much of children's time is structured and supervised by adults. This is even though different children are ready for different challenges at different ages (Rogoff, 2003) and that responsive caregiving should provide opportunities for independence that are developmentally appropriate.

There are cases across the U.S. of governmental authorities investigating school-age children for playing, walking home, or being alone without constant adult supervision as indicative of neglectful parenting, and this treatment, in turn, has led to traumatic, threatening, and punitive consequences for families (see Fuller & Redleaf, 2015; Haidt & Skenazy, 2017; Redleaf, 2022). For example, cases on this topic include a village that forbade children from using the library without an adult present if they are under the age of 12, under threat of calling the authorities for violations (Skenazy, 2009a); a 7-year-old who was stopped by police for running around the block in Colorado (Brown, 2022); and an 8-year-old whose mother faced neglect charges for allowing her to walk the dog in Illinois (Bevar, 2018). In all these cases children were participating in activities that their parents had determined were appropriate. However, the laws in some states claim that

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

these behaviors reflect neglectful parenting without consideration of the child's ability or the context. These situations may contribute to the cultural shift away from allowing children to engage in age-appropriate independent activities as parents may be worried about the backlash.

Vague child neglect laws are another contributor to this cultural shift and the negative consequences on families, particularly among communities of color (see Pimentel, 2019; Redleaf, 2022). The vagueness of these laws leads to confusing child neglect with poverty and contributes to disadvantaged communities' disproportionate intervention by law enforcement and CPS (Gupta-Kagan, 2022; Roberts, 2022). Additionally, increasing hotline calls and investigations of families places burdens on the limited resources of government agencies responsible for safeguarding children, diluting the attention available-to children in danger of serious abuse and neglect (Pimentel, 2015; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2012).

These factors illustrate the need for clearer policy defining appropriate child supervision and healthy childhood independence versus harmful supervisory neglect. Parents and policymakers can benefit from the knowledge and skills of developmental scientists in determining these distinctions. For example, researchers on supervisory neglect suggest that judgments of parents' behavior should be based upon objective consideration of the frequency, chronicity, and extent of poor supervision (Morrongiello & Cox, 2020). However, laws and policies do not generally reflect these points. Developmental researchers can also contribute by discussing topics such as what constitutes minimally acceptable care for a child and what level of lack of supervision warrants intervention from government agencies.

This paper first discusses the legal and cultural landscape that has led to a diminution of children's engagement in independent activities. We then turn to the child development trajectories as well as perspectives beyond Western culture that can inform the adoption of sound laws. We conclude with recommendations for parents, legislators, and developmental science researchers to align law and policy with child development research.

The Legal Landscape

Challenge of defining supervisory neglect

Every year, more than 7 million children are reported to CPS hotlines in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), 2022). These hotline calls result in two million cases opened for investigation or a service response in the United States, with approximately 620,000 cases deemed to be "substantiated" (i.e., cases in which, upon investigation, some form of abuse or neglect is deemed to have occurred) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), 2022). Sixty percent of these cases concern "neglect only" cases (i.e., the cases present no claim of physical or sexual abuse) (Pimentel, 2015; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), 2022). However, it is unclear how many neglect cases fall within the area of "supervisory neglect," because many states' laws, policies, and data reports do not distinguish between different forms of neglect (Redleaf, 2022a, 2022b). For example, Arizona is a state that maintained subcategorized data, meaning that it breaks neglect cases into categories such as

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

supervisory neglect, emotional neglect, physical neglect, or medical neglect. In Arizona, the number of cases in the neglectful supervision category exceeded all other neglect cases (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2017). Additionally, most of these supervisory neglect cases were ultimately deemed "unfounded" (i.e., determined to be lacking in merit upon investigation; unsubstantiated), which means that the resources spent in investigating these matters drained the system's resources to protect children suffering from serious abuse (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2017; Pimentel, 2015; Redleaf, 2022). Similarly, research in Canada has established that the threshold for determining supervisory neglect is too low; finding that 96% of cases resulted in no physical harm to the child, and 74% of the cases did not involve any mental or emotional harm to the child (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2012).

Universally agreed-upon definitions of supervisory neglect are hard to find in both the legal and research landscape (American Law Institute (ALI), 2019; Morrongiello & Cox, 2020; Proctor & Dubowitz, 2014; Redleaf, 2022; Straus & Kantor, 2005). This is because child neglect is multidimensional and context-dependent, and it presents differently based on the age of the child (Proctor & Dubowitz, 2014). In addition, neglect is particularly wide-ranging because, unlike abuse, it deals with *omissions* of care rather than specific actions or behaviors (Morton & Salovitz, 2006). Broadly, developmental science treats neglectful behavior as the failure to meet the developmental needs of a child (Straus & Kantor, 2005). However, there is great variation in children's developmental needs, and parenting behaviors, and environmental risks (Morrongiello & Cox, 2020).

The difficulty of defining supervisory neglect contributes to the overly broad definitions adopted in some Western countries. For example, the Australian government's Institute of Family Studies identifies supervisory neglect as inadequate supervision that leads to potentially serious harm to the child (Scott et al., 2012). U.S. legal definitions often set the threshold lower, referencing merely a risk of unspecified harm (Coohey, 2003). Some state laws define neglect as the lack of "proper" care or use the term "without supervision," implying that any child who is not constantly supervised by an adult could be determined to be "neglected" (Gupta-Kagan, 2022; Pimentel, 2015; Redleaf, 2020b, 2022). These definitions provide little guidance as to how potential harms may vary depending on the age and abilities of the child (Dubowitz et al., 2022). Morrongiello and Cox (2020) note that supervisory neglect exists along a continuum; there is not a clear "sufficient/insufficient supervision" dichotomy. They suggest an appropriate assessment examines the parent's supervisory capacity and the child's capabilities all within the context of the child's environment.

An overabundance of monitoring and control can lead to other needs of the child not being met, while too little monitoring and control can endanger children's safety.

Moreover, the issue of properly defining minimally adequate supervision also misses the dangers of over-supervision. In other words, neglect policy runs into an Odyssean "Scylla vs. Charybdis" dilemma (e.g., the challenge of charting a course between two equally unacceptable options). In this case, an overabundance of monitoring and control can lead to other needs of the child not being met (e.g., the need for independence), while too little monitoring and control can

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

endanger children's safety. Parents who engage in intensive or over-supervision, colloquially known as “helicopter parents,” raise “cotton wool kids” (Bristow, 2014; O'Malley, 2015; Pimentel, 2015). “Cotton wool kids” are children whose development is hindered because of the lack of experiences and opportunities to develop their independence. For example, research shows that children who are granted less independent mobility, defined as children's ability to travel and play in public spaces without adult supervision, engaged in less physical activity than children who have more independent mobility (Stone et al., 2014). Parents who fail to provide their children opportunities for physical and cognitive stimulation through independent activities are potentially “neglecting” their children in those dimensions.

Another potential concern with opened-ended neglect laws is that they invite state intervention into family life in a manner that is harmful and traumatic, as well as racially disproportionate. Current statistics in the U.S. suggest that 37% of children experience an investigation by child protective services in their childhood, and of those children, a disproportionate percentage (53%) are Black children (Kim et al., 2017). Roberts (2022) highlights the roots of child protection system's interventions to separate families in the United States' legacy of slavery and racial segregation. In addition, the author highlights the connection between “family policing” by the CPS system and the carceral systems operated by police, prosecutors, and prisons. Indeed, a parent who opens their doors to law enforcement or CPS investigators during a home visit following a hotline call sometimes experience explosive, life-altering ramifications. For example, Redleaf (2020c) and Roberts (2022) report the neglect case against Vanessa Peoples, a mother who was investigated because her child briefly wandered away from her in a park. This resulted in a hotline call and misdemeanor charges which required routine checks of her home. Then during one of these routine well-being checks, Peoples was literally hogtied by police in her own home for not answering the door because she was in the basement (Moriarpy, 2022). Advocates for racial and social justice increasingly call for fundamental changes in CPS laws and policies that authorize such interventions in the name of child protection (Roberts, 2022).

Part of the problem is that very little guidance is available to hotline responders (i.e., social workers, CPS, police) who are responsible for investigating cases and enforcing child neglect laws (Gupta-Kagan, 2022). As of 2022, there are 44 states that have child neglect laws that were vague, defining neglect as “lack of supervision” (Let Grow, n.d.a). In these cases, states make CPS caseworkers responsible for deciding if a particular situation should be deemed neglectful (Redleaf, 2020a). This is problematic because, as research using focus groups has found, CPS caseworkers and other service providers do not always rely on their professional experience and training when making judgments about children's supervision (Grégoire-Labrecque et al., 2020). Instead, they rely on their personal experiences. This can be detrimental because they may not use their training to reduce bias or use legal frameworks as guidance when making decisions (Grégoire-Labrecque et al., 2020). It is especially challenging to eliminate biased decision-making where laws, policies, and training do not create a sufficiently clear and objective method for limiting biases. Some celebrated cases have dramatized these concerns. In 2014, parents in Silver Spring,

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Maryland faced a CPS neglect investigation when they allowed their two children, ages 6 and 10 to walk home from a familiar park (Joyce, 2015). The parents had prepared their children for the experience to ensure they were ready. Despite the children's comfort with their own independence, the parents were threatened with neglect charges; the children were detained by police when the parents allowed the children to walk home a second time. This case was widely publicized through popular media (see, for example, ABC News, 2015; St. George, 2015). Shortly after the Maryland case, Chicago-area Latinx mother Natasha Felix's case also made national news when she was cited for neglect for allowing her 5-, 9-, and 11-year-old children to play in the park next to her apartment (CBS Chicago, 2015; Fuller & Redleaf, 2015; St. George & Schulte, 2015). The neglect citation against Felix precluded her from working in home health care, which impacted her family's income and well-being during the 2-year period while her appeals were pending. Note: for an extensive review of similar cases, and the media's role in publicizing these examples, see Pimentel (2015).

Status of supervisory neglect laws in the United States

Theoretically, the United States Constitution protects the right of parents in the first instance to determine when and if their children are ready for independence, including by engaging in activities that are not supervised by an adult or responsible older child (i.e., serving as a babysitter or monitor). This general principle is rooted in the First, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments and has been repeatedly reinforced as "fundamental" by the United States Supreme Court (Meyer v. Nebraska, n.d.; Troxel v. Granville, n.d.). Nevertheless, these rights do not prevent parents from being subjected to investigations and charged with child endangerment or neglect by law enforcement authorities or CPS. This is because the rights of parents to the care and control of their children extend only to "fit" parents, not those lawfully deemed abusive or neglectful (Troxel v. Granville, n.d.). And the State has ultimate authority as "parens patriae" to care for children if the parents are unfit, unwilling, and unable to do so (Longley, 2021). Under the guise of protecting children from parents who are harming them, the overwhelming majority of states have laws and policies that permit or encourage the treatment of unsupervised children as neglected (Let Grow Maps Project, n.d.a).

Recently some states have made changes, however, to protect families from overbroad neglect laws. In 2018, Utah (2018) redefined its neglect law to define childhood independence stating, "*Neglect* does not include permitting a child who is of sufficient age and maturity to avoid harm or unreasonable risk of harm, to engage in independent activities, including: (A) traveling to and from school, including by walking, running, or bicycling; (B) traveling to and from nearby commercial or recreational facilities; (C) engaging in outdoor play; (D) remaining in a vehicle unattended; (E) remaining at home unattended; or (F) engaging in a similar independent activity."

Oklahoma (Oklahoma House Bill 2565, 2021), Texas (Texas House Bill 567, 2021), and Colorado (Colorado House Bill 22-1090, 2022) followed suit, passing laws explicitly protecting children's reasonable independence (Let Grow Maps Project, n.d.a). For example, Oklahoma's law (Oklahoma House Bill 2565, 2021) redefined neglect overall,

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

stating, "*Neglect* means …: (1) the failure or omission to provide supervision or appropriate caretakers to protect the child from harm or threatened harm of which any reasonable and prudent person responsible for the child's health, safety or welfare would be aware, special care made necessary for the child's health and safety by the physical or mental condition of the child." The law also adds that neglect "shall not mean a child who engages in independent activities, except if the person responsible for the child's health, safety or welfare willfully disregards any harm or threatened harm to the child, given the child's level of maturity, physical condition or mental abilities" and includes a similar listing of independent activities as Utah (Oklahoma House Bill 2565, 2021). While these laws narrow neglect definitions, they leave room for CPS agencies to determine that children are neglected if they can show that the parents willfully disregarded a child's health, safety, or welfare, by ignoring obvious dangers or allowing the child to engage in an activity that was harmful considering their developmental abilities. Such laws are representative of the greater specificity needed to distinguish between dangerous and healthy unsupervised activities for children.

14 states have laws and policies that include age limits which may be untethered to child development principles for when children can be unsupervised.

In addition to vague or punitive laws, 14 states have laws and policies that include age limits which may be untethered to child development principles for when children can be unsupervised (Let Grow, n.d.a; Washington Post, n.d). This wide developmental age range demonstrates confusion and a lack of consensus about child development by policymakers. For example, some states, such as Maryland, have laws that children should never be alone before the age of 12 (Let Grow, n.d.a). On the other side of the spectrum, Kansas and Minnesota have much more liberal policies, recognizing that children by six (Kansas Department for Children and Families, 2012) or seven (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2023) can be unsupervised and neglect cases do not need to be opened in these circumstances. The question of whether law and policy should specify age limits upon the ability of children to engage in independent activities came up explicitly in the South Carolina legislature in 2019. A state Senator introduced an amendment that would have changed the law so it would be neglectful for children younger than 9 to be unsupervised. (South Carolina House Bill 79, 2019). This amendment was defeated after the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony from 9-year-old Blaise about how this law would stop him from playing outside with his little brother (Skenazy, n.d.a). Similar testimony was presented again in South Carolina in 2022 by a 6-year-old girl who enjoyed playing in her neighborhood with her 5-year-old sister without her mother constantly watching over them (Skenazy, n.d.b). (Let Grow, 2020; Let Grow, n.d.b) It is shocking that it took testimony from children to convince lawmakers that age restrictions are not necessary when child development research supports the idea of developmentally appropriate opportunities for independence. There is a need for more connections between research and policy.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

These controversies and attempts to legislate standards that differentiate healthy child development practices from neglectful parenting choices raise questions for developmental scientists. At what ages can children safely walk to school by themselves? When can a child be home alone? And how does a parent know that their child is ready? For example, Colorado law adopted the "reasonable and prudent parent" judgment standard that allowed parents to make judgments based on their knowledge of their children's "maturity, condition and abilities" (Colorado House Bill 22-1090, 2022). However, the law itself does not provide guidance to parents as to how they should assess these qualities in their children. In the absence of knowing the developmental research, well-intended legislators and policymakers sometimes adopt their own theories (i.e., folk science). Developmental scientists know that the question "When do children have the ability to be unsupervised?" does not have a single straightforward answer. Instead, it is complicated and varies by historical cohort, culture, and when, where, and for how long the child might be unsupervised. In the following section, we discuss developmental capabilities related to independent activities and how opportunities for independence are necessary for healthy development.

Developmental Trajectories of Independence

Rogoff (2003) discusses how different cultures vary in what experiences are developmentally appropriate or dangerous for children resulting in very different childhood experiences by culture. But despite these differences, there are some cross-cultural similarities in beliefs about developmental trajectories. Children's roles and responsibilities in their social setting often undergo a qualitative shift around 5–7 years old (Rogoff et al., 1975). Analyzing 50 cultures, Rogoff et al. (1975) examined the age at which different cultures treated children as ready to have new social responsibilities or be able to take on a new social role in the community. For example, in many communities around the world, children as young as 5 years old take responsibility for caring for younger children. Many of the cultures examined had these shifts in the 5–7 age range.

Despite this and other research indicating new capabilities around this age, U.S. middle-class families often believe that children are not capable of these skills until at least 10 years old. For example, child protective authorities in Georgia recently criminally charged a mother for allowing her 14-year-old daughter to babysit (Skenazy, 2022), at odds with the Red Cross training babysitters starting at age 11 (Fuller & Redleaf, 2015). This contrast is another example of how the cultural norms, laws, and policies regarding child supervision may vary. The disconnect demonstrates a need for a comprehensive review of developmental trajectories of childhood independence.

In our review, we focus on the capabilities that children have at age 5 and beyond and focus more specifically on middle childhood, which we define as age 6 to 12 years old. Throughout this section, we will use the example of a child walking to school to illustrate each of the developmental domains. We chose walking to school because there is evidence that this experience has changed dramatically for children over time, related to the changing legal and cultural landscape. Prior to the passage

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

of the federal "hotline law" (CAPTA, 1974), almost 50% of 5–14-year-old children walked or biked to school on their own. As of 2018, only 13% of children did so across the nation (Jamme et al., 2018).

In addition to reviewing the normative trajectories of the childhood independence skills, we will also highlight some of the developmental variations. Based upon biological, contextual, and cultural differences, children may be more or less ready for independence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, capturing all the variations in development or providing extensive examples of independent activities is beyond the scope of this paper. In a later section on cultural perspectives of childhood independence, we address some parenting beliefs and practices that lead to some of this variation.

Finally, for each domain, we discuss the importance of practice and experience in reaching developmental milestones. The skills related to independence do not emerge solely due to biological maturation, but through the opportunities and experiences children have practicing these and related skills. Development is an inherently social process, and children's engagement in everyday activities provides them with opportunities to participate in the world that they would not have on their own (Gauvain & Perez, 2007). Children go through qualitative changes in how they think and behave because of these experiences. As with variations in development, covering all the developmental mechanisms for childhood independence is beyond the scope of this paper, but certain factors will be discussed.

The skills related to independence do not emerge solely due to biological maturation, but through the opportunities and experiences children have practicing these and related skills.

Physical development

Motor skills and physical well-being are some of the primary capabilities needed for children to participate in activities independently. Gross motor skills include movements that require large muscles or muscle groups (e.g., running), while fine motor skills use small muscles or muscle groups (e.g., writing with a pencil) (Payne et al., 2016). Skills like walking, climbing, running, and jumping proficiently all contribute to the ability of children to do activities independently. In addition, skills such as reaching items on shelves, riding a bike, using tools (e.g., sweeping/raking/shoveling), using a phone, and carrying objects require a level of physical capacity, including sophisticated motor skills for children to be able to accomplish various tasks alone. In the U.S., by age 6 children typically can ride tricycles, climb ladders, and throw, catch, and kick balls. Elementary school-age children 7–12 years old can master any motor skill that does not require an adult-size body (Payne et al., 2016). For example, by about age 9, children's running and jumping skills are at the same level as adults.

Assessments of U.S. children's motor skills suggest significant variation due to multiple factors, such as biological, motivational, cognitive, and social ones (Ulrich,

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

2000). The age at which children master certain locomotive skills can vary significantly. Approximately 40% of 3-year-olds have mastery of running, but 80% of 7-year-olds do. Only 10% of 3-year-olds demonstrate mastery of performing a horizontal jump, but 45% of 10-year-olds do (Ulrich, 2000). The variation exists for fine motor control as well. As few as 1% of 3-year-olds demonstrate mastery of catching a ball, but 72% of 8-year-olds do (Ulrich, 2000).

Children need a certain set of physical skills and abilities to walk to school on their own. The child needs to physically transport themselves (e.g., motor skills such as walking, running, wheeling their wheelchair, or riding their bicycle), the physical coordination of those skills needed to traverse their environment (e.g., coordination needed to balance their bicycle or not frequently trip and fall when walking), and the physical fitness to get there (e.g., having the strength and endurance to travel the distance to school). From a physical development perspective, most 6- or 7-year-olds have the skills needed to walk alone to school.

There are a host of factors that contribute to the development of children's motor skills (Adolph & Hoch, 2019; Foulkes et al., 2015). But a primary contributor is children's experience with physical activity (Ali et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2005). The more that children engage in physical activity, the more their motor skills will improve. Beyond just the opportunity, children require instruction and practice to demonstrate mastery of fundamental movement skills. Walking to school and other independent activities have been shown to be related to children's physical development. Children who have more independent mobility have greater physical activity profiles, which in turn leads to healthier overall development (Stone et al., 2014).

Cognitive development

Cognition includes the mental activities that allow humans to examine, use, remember, and communicate information (Bjorklund, 2022; Gauvain, 2022). Infancy and early childhood are periods of especially rapid cognitive growth, which is then refined throughout middle childhood (6–12 years old), resulting in a high level of skill that allows them to understand and participate in the world in complex ways (Gauvain, 2022). Cognitive abilities, such as perception, attention, inhibition, memory, decision-making, and problem-solving, all improve greatly between 4- and 7-years old (Best & Miller, 2010; Blair & Raver, 2015; Zelazo, 2015). These skills help children attend to relevant information and ignore distraction, which are helpful and necessary for formal schooling and independent activities.

In addition, children's language abilities, both receptive (i.e., ability to understand) and expressive (i.e., ability to produce) are key skills needed to understand rules, ask questions and explain themselves (Bjorklund, 2022; Gleitman et al., 2019). Children learn the social patterns of speech, including how to listen and respond appropriately, by age 4 (Gauvain, 2022; Gleitman et al., 2019). Language skills are often tied to literacy skills, which can be important if reading signs or following instructions are part of a child's independent activity (Bjorklund, 2022; Connor et al., 2006). However, proficient reading is not a pre-requisite for independence,

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

depending on the task. For example, even prior to learning to read children can help with cooking, make a sandwich for themselves, or can learn how to use a microwave by themselves; but following a written recipe would require higher literacy skills, which develop and increase in complexity throughout childhood (Bjorklund, 2022).

Spatial abilities, including thinking about locations, the relationships between locations, and remembering locations (Pruden et al., 2019), are additional cognitive skills related to independent activities. For example, if children are walking to school or somewhere in their community, spatial skills will help them to not get lost and to remember the route home. Spatial thinking, including the ability to understand directions and maps, improves over childhood (Uttal & Wellman, 1989; Uttal et al., 2006). Four- and 5-year-olds can learn to understand what a map represents and how to use it, and 10-year-olds can create mental models of maps nearly at adult levels (Uttal & Wellman, 1989; Uttal et al., 2006). Like many areas of development, spatial skills can be improved with practice (Uttal et al., 2013). Research by Jamme et al. (2018) found that elementary school students who walked to school were able to draw community and street maps from a birds-eye view with a level of skill similar to adult representations.

Imagine all the cognitive abilities that apply to the actions involved in a child's walk to school on their own. The child needs to remember the route (memory and spatial skills), attend to where they are going (attention), be flexible in their thinking in case something about their route has changed (cognitive flexibility), and they need to solve problems they might encounter on the way (decision-making and problem-solving). In addition, they need the language skills to be able to ask for help from people if they need it and to understand what they are being told. This complex set of skills may seem advanced, however, as we have reviewed by age 8 (and younger depending on experience and context; see Section III), most children are at an adequate developmental level and could walk to school depending on the location and distance.

The development of children's cognitive abilities and their use in independent activities is influenced by many social and contextual factors (Best & Miller, 2010; Blair & Raver, 2015; Gauvain, 2022). Socio-cultural theory suggests that children's cognitive development emerges as they participate in difficult culturally organized practices (Gauvain & Perez, 2007). Traveling to school is one such practice. As children walk to school independently, they are using their decision-making, problem-solving, responsibility, and independence skills. These skills would not be practiced if an accompanying parent took charge of those activities. Cross-cultural research shows that, depending upon the environment, children as young as 5 or 6 years old could walk to school alone, if they have practiced it previously with an adult (Shaw et al., 2015). The most important factor (regardless of age) is if they have walked to school before, practiced it, and discussed their plan with an adult, because children's cognition develops through their experiences and gets strengthened through routines (Best & Miller, 2010; Gauvain, 2022).

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Social-emotional development

Social and emotional skills are key developmental milestones for school readiness, and highly related to children's ability to be independent. These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), n.d; Payton et al., 2000). Developing these skills allows children to manage emotions, cope with frustrations, control impulses, interact with adults and peers, and respond to environmental changes. Social and emotional development begins in infancy and continues through adolescence (Denham, 1998, 2019; Denham et al., 2003).

Social development refers to children's understanding of their social worlds and the kinds of social interactions they can have with others (CASEL, n.d; Denham, 2019). The development of social cognition and social awareness is well-established by middle childhood (Eisenberg et al., 2015). These skills help children interpret their family situation as well as the world around them. Children have the ability to process and interpret cues in social situations, arrive at competent decisions, and behave accordingly (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Crick & Dodge, 1994). A major vehicle for children's development of social skills is their play with other children, independent of adult control. To play together, children must decide together what and how to play, reinforce the rules or boundaries with one another as they play, and attend actively to one another's needs (Frost et al., 2012; Furth, 1996; Gray, 2013).

Theory of Mind is children's ability to think about one's own and others' mental states, including thoughts, desires, beliefs, and feelings (Wellman, 2014; Wellman & Lagattuta, 2000; Wellman et al., 2001). Theory of mind also includes children's understanding of others' intentions, a potentially important aspect of childhood independence if the independent child is playing outside, interacting with others, or running an errand (Wellman, 2014). Theory of Mind is typically well developed by age 4 (Wellman, 2014). Though a child's understanding of mental states continues to develop, by 8 years old children understand more complex reasoning, and by 9 years old they can even fully understand irony and sarcasm (Glenwright & Pexman, 2010). Theory of Mind is advanced through children's social interactions with other children and adults (Flavell, 2004). Research also examines the development of whom children endorse as trustworthy. For example, 4- and 5-year-olds trust their mother more than a stranger, but even at that age, they can update their views of people's trustworthiness based on new information (Corriveau et al., 2009; Gauvain, 2022; Ronfard & Lane, 2018). This developmental skill is important if a child is to participate in independent activities in which they might encounter strangers (e.g., going to the grocery store for bread, playing at the playground).

Emotional development includes children's ability to understand their own and others' feelings and express their own feelings and emotions appropriately (Dehham, 1998; Eisenberg, 2000). By 5 or 6 years old, children understand their own expression of basic emotions, such as happiness, sadness, and fear, and self-conscious emotions, including guilt, jealousy, pride, and embarrassment (Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007; Wellman & Lagattuta, 2000). Throughout middle childhood and into

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

adolescence children continue to develop the ability to understand these emotions in others, the complexity of feeling one emotion, but displaying another (e.g., being sad on the inside, but smiling on the outside), and the causes and consequences of feeling emotions (Harris et al., 1986).

The development of self-regulation, defined as the ability to manage states, thoughts, and behavior, is also an important aspect of children's school-readiness and capacity for independence (Blair & Raver, 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Kochanska et al., 2001). Self-regulation helps with goal-directed behaviors contributing to independence through remembering and following rules, and understanding consequences (Kochanska et al., 2001). These skills develop throughout childhood, with a focus in preschool to teach and practice these skills. By the age of 5, most children will be ready for formal education, which requires the ability to self-regulate so that they can follow instructions, wait rather than immediately act on their impulses, remember what they are told, interact reasonably well with others, and control themselves most of the time. By elementary school, most children have mastered most of the self-regulation skills they will need in a wide variety of settings (Markus & Nurius, 1984).

We can apply the social perspective to the same example of a child being ready to walk to school. Children need to have enough self-regulation to know they need to stop at a stop sign, look both ways, and then cross the street. During their walk, they may need to interpret social situations, such as if they encounter a group of rowdy teenagers. If they have seen this situation before and it made them uncomfortable, they may choose to cross the street to avoid it (social processing skills). They need Theory of Mind to understand who might be trustworthy and to adapt their belief about that person if needed. Finally, the child needs to know how to seek help if a problem emerges en route. Most of these skills are well-developed by the time children enter elementary school. However, variations exist based on experiences that children have as social-emotional skills develop and grow through practice (Blair & Raver, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1984). Therefore, independent experiences allow children to improve their social-emotional skills in healthy and productive ways.

Summary of developmental trajectories

In summary, children need certain physical, cognitive, and social skills to engage in unsupervised or independent activities. We have provided one example, walking to school, however, the developmental skills needed will be similar for many activities. The literature on children's ability to be “school ready” in the domains of physical well-being and motor development, cognition and language and literacy, and social and emotional development provides a good framework for considering childhood independence (Kagan et al., 1995). While many of the developmental trajectories continue to develop throughout middle childhood, many of them are at adequate levels for entering formal schooling at the age of 5 or 6.

In addition, research supports the idea that child development (and independence) is influenced by children's experiences and their families, and the communities in which they are raised (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ghandour et al., 2019; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). Therefore, children who have certain experiences (e.g., watching a

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

younger sibling or helping care for their grandmother) will be more ready for more challenging or complex opportunities at an earlier age than those who do not have those experiences. This leads to variations in experiences meaning variations in the age in which children can accomplish a task.

Parenting behaviors are a significant influence on children's readiness for independence. Sunarty and Dirawan (2015) explained that parents hinder their child's development of independence by treating them in ways that are below their developmental level, which includes constraining their activities. This speaks to the idea that adults who underestimate children's capacities prevent them from developing their full potential. Gopnik (2016) explained that there has been a shift where adults have forgotten how capable school-age children can be in managing seemingly adult activities safely and productively. Our example of the abilities that children need to walk to school alone may seem complicated at first glance, but we know that children significantly younger than 8 years old once were widely considered fully capable of getting to school and home. And around the world, by age 6 or 7, children contribute extensively to their family's economic well-being (Gopnick, 2016). Parents who do not give children opportunities to build independent skills may underestimate what children can do at surprisingly young ages, as our discussion in the next section shows.

Cultural Perspectives

Responsive caregiving includes providing developmentally appropriate challenges, which is sometimes at odds with current child neglect policies in the United States. In fact, allowing children to have challenges, risks, and opportunities for independence is important for development. Because the research and laws related to supervisory neglect were developed within a Western cultural perspective it is important to understand how culture is influencing parents, families, educators, and lawmakers in regard to childhood independence.

In this section, we examine how Western cultural perspective (and laws) may differ from those around the world. We examine different cultural parenting beliefs and attitudes toward childcare in order to demonstrate that abilities are often culturally determined and experience-driven rather than innate. Childhood independence across the world varies greatly, and much of this variation is due to the beliefs of parents about their child's development. These beliefs are rooted in cultural differences. We draw from the theoretical perspectives of Harkness et al. (2013) and Super and Harkness (1986) on parental ethnotheories which are defined as "culturally constructed ideas about children's development, the family, and parenting" (Harkness et al., 2013, p. 148). In this section we first discuss cultural difference in understanding children's developmental capabilities, including their ability to be unsupervised; we then discuss how parents' goals for childrearing may vary by culture; finally we explore the cross-cultural research on children's independent

Childhood independence across the world varies greatly, and much of this variation is due to the beliefs of parents about their child's development.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

activities. The examination of other cultures' beliefs about child development can inform how the United States can better understand supervisory neglect and childhood independence (Harkness et al., 2013).

Cultural beliefs about children's developmental capacities

A specific parental belief that varies by culture is about the nature of child development. Most parental beliefs about children's developmental abilities are handed down from generation to generation, shared among the members of the community, and often are not explicit. Each cultural group has its own set of beliefs about children's developmental trajectories, and those beliefs contribute to their decisions on how and when to supervise children or give them independence (Miconi et al., 2018). Parents from English-speaking countries generally expect children to have the capability to be unsupervised around 9- or 10-years-old, but Japanese and Kenyan parents expect children to have such capabilities by 5 or 6 years of age (Brown et al., 2008; Goodnow et al., 1984; Joshi & Maclean, 1997; Kyttä et al., 2018; Schoeppe et al., 2016; Super & Harkness, 1986; Tranter & Pawson, 2001).

The differences in beliefs about development do not just influence the decisions that parents make, but also children's developmental outcomes. Just looking at motor skill development, incredible diversity exists between cultures (Karasik et al., 2010). Children in Cameroon can sit unsupported at 4-months-old, a full 2 months earlier than most U.S. children. Mothers in Cameroon even leave their 5-month-old infants unattended on high stools for over 20 min (Karasik et al., 2010). In fact, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention had to revise their growth charts to account for some of these cross-cultural differences in developmental trajectories (Kuczmarski et al., 2000). These differences in skill acquisition are not due to genetics, but due to parenting practices and experiences.

Cultural beliefs about parental goals

Parents in different cultures also have very different goals for their children. In her memoir, Yale Law professor Amy Chua described her childrearing philosophy as “tiger parenting” (Chua, 2011). She focused almost exclusively on her children's academic achievement at the expense of their happiness and self-esteem. Her view on parenting created heated debates in the U.S. with many criticizing her parenting attitudes and behaviors. Even the American Psychological Association's Developmental Psychology division weighed in, discussing how tiger parenting is not successful (Kim, 2013). The real issue many had with Chua was not how she raised her children or the outcomes it had, but what her underlying goals of parenting were. Many believed her job as a parent was to raise a happy and healthy child, not a hyper-achieving one.

Similarly, questions about the appropriate level of supervision of children are informed by parental goals, and evaluations of supervision behaviors are seen as either positive or negative depending upon the culture's beliefs about those goals (Miconi et al., 2018). For example, in collectivistic cultures, supervision is seen not as just a way to physically protect the child, but as a way to foster interdependence and social relationships (Miconi et al., 2018). In individualistic cultures, supervision can

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

be viewed as an arrangement that detracts from the development of the child's self-reliance and self-esteem (Gopnik, 2016; Miconi et al., 2018). While there are many childrearing goals that parents have, the value of self-reliance is most connected to supervisory and independence-granting behaviors.

Self-reliance is the child's ability to self-initiate and self-regulate their behavior (Edwards & Liu, 2002). It is a developmental competency that is necessary for becoming a successful adult in society and highly valued in certain cultures, but this also varies widely. For example, African- and Mexican-American parents reportedly assign greater importance to autonomy than Chinese and European-American parents (Suizzo, 2007). Many studies of Indigenous communities in the U.S. also show a high value placed on self-reliance. In these communities, children are integrated into "adult" daily tasks, such as household work, food preparation, and childcare (Coppens et al., 2016). As a result, children develop self-reliance at an earlier age compared to other Western populations. This parenting behavior is not because of the socio-economic need of the family, but the parental view that this integration and early self-reliance is essential to children's development as human beings (Coppens et al., 2016). Children's autonomy and initiative are supported and encouraged by parents in these communities.

Self-reliance and autonomy are highly valued in other cultures as well. Self-sufficiency is highly valued among the Matsigenka people of the Peruvian Amazon, and a common childrearing technique is to allow children to learn through trial and error, rather than preventing and intervening in harmful situations (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). Parents in Norway are also considered generally less risk-averse than parents in other developed countries and view their role as parents as preparing children to be independent and meet the challenges of life (Obee et al., 2021). They see risk as a natural part of children's lives that affords children the opportunity to learn through mistakes, develop self-confidence and toughness, and learn how to properly assess risk on their own.

Cross-cultural research on independent activities

The differences in how parents understand children's developmental capabilities paired with their goals for their children leads to very different parenting practices related to childhood independence. Internationally, there is wide variation in how much parents choose to monitor or supervise their children. In an examination of the wide variability in child independence, Ruiz-Casares et al. (2018) analyzed UNICEF data from 61 low- and middle-income countries on how often parents left their under-5-year-old child home alone (i.e., unsupervised by any other children or adults). Great variation existed, ranging from Serbia, where 0.1% of respondents left their child home alone, to Chad, where 35.3% of respondents left their child home alone. In general, countries in the West and Central Africa region and the South Asia region had the highest rates of leaving children alone. Many cultures view care of younger siblings to be a crucial task for children. In many African communities, care for a younger sibling is common by 8- or 9-years of age (Laird, 2016; Super & Harkness, 1986). Parents in Botswana, Mexico, and Vietnam leave their children unsupervised and under the care of siblings, aware of both the risks and benefits of such decisions (Ruiz-Casares & Heymann, 2009). Immigrant parents in the U.S. generally view children's need for supervision similarly to U.S.-born parents, but they are much more likely to leave an older sibling caring for a younger one during unsupervised

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

time (Greene et al., 2011). Many collectivistic cultures utilize indirect supervision, where community members or older siblings are used for child-care (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; Coppens et al., 2016; Greene et al., 2011; Joshi & Maclean, 1997; Laird, 2016; Suizzo, 2007).

Differences in cultural beliefs are also evident in an examination of children's independent mobility. Children's independent mobility is a specific form of unsupervised time where parents allow their children to travel without them. A comparative analysis of South Africa, Tanzania, Japan, and Australia showed that Japanese children have the most independence overall and Australian children have the least overall (Malone & Rudner, 2011). Childhood independence in Japan can be seen firsthand on *Old Enough!*, a reality television show that features unsupervised toddlers running errands for their parents (Fry, 2022). There is also wide variation in the age and distance that children are allowed to travel. A study of 16 countries found that children from France, Israel, and Sri Lanka are afforded the lowest levels of independence in traveling and playing in their neighborhood without adult supervision. For example, only 15% of French parents allowed their 7-year-olds to cross main roads alone. On the other end of the spectrum, children from Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Japan, and Denmark had high levels of independent mobility. Independent mobility in Finland was dramatically higher than any other nation; where approximately 40% of Finnish parents allowed their 7-year-olds to cross main roads alone (Shaw et al., 2015). In general, Finland is an outlier in how much parents allow their children to go unsupervised (Fyhri et al., 2011; Kyttä et al., 2015, 2018; Shaw et al., 2015). Finnish parents give their children substantial opportunities for independent mobility. Not only this, but Finnish children's independent time is qualitatively different as they spend more unstructured and unsupervised time with friends (Kyttä et al., 2018). These parenting practices are due to Scandinavian parents believing children need to be independent and able to meet the challenges of life on their own (Obee et al., 2021). This is in contrast to places like Japan, an outlier in independent mobility, where children spend much of their independent time in highly structured routines.

Around the world, young children are also given "adult" work either due to necessity or the cultural belief that it is good for their development. U.S. parents who operate a family farm often include their children in the work at an early age (Neufeld et al., 2002). Supervision occurred while training the children, but once sufficient mastery was in place, children would perform the work unsupervised. Neufeld et al. (2002) found children younger than 8-years-old are helping with minor tasks such as repair work and cleaning, while 12-year-olds are operating heavy farm machinery with infrequent supervision. Tsimane (a Bolivian Amazonian indigenous group) parents allow their 6-year-old children to travel approximately 5 km (3.1 m) from the village unsupervised (Davis & Cashdan, 2020). While these parents do not know where their children are at any given time, they feel confident they know where their children are not, because they taught their children not to travel to high-risk areas, such as the river or forest. Another example, perhaps shocking to Western parents, is that independent child migrants are a common phenomenon in Ghana. Children, usually young adolescents but sometimes younger, migrate to other parts of the country without their parents (Amoah, 2020). But this is not due to child neglect. Children are often traveling to live under the care of

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

extended family in other parts of the country. The migratory experience is seen as beneficial for the child, allowing them to be socialized into the culture.

Cultural beliefs about defining neglect

While beliefs about childhood independence and supervision vary greatly between countries and cultures, interestingly, not as many differences exist in what constitutes severe child neglect (Lansford et al., 2015). In the Republic of Palau, an island country in the Pacific, severe forms of child maltreatment are judged very similarly to international standards (Futterman Collier et al., 1999). However, many situations that could constitute supervisory neglect in Western countries are viewed as common parenting practices in Palau. As long as the child is in the presence of an adult in the community, Palauan parents consider the child to be under supervision. The cultural belief is that the whole community is involved in caring for the child, so the parent does not need to maintain direct supervision all the time.

In an examination of child neglect in nine countries (China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States), the acceptance of corporal punishment, but not the acceptance of child neglect, was a significant predictor of differences between cultures. Parents from all nine countries also reported low levels of neglect of their children (Putnick et al., 2012). American Indian and Alaskan Native parents in the U.S. perceive a significant lack of supervision as a serious form of neglect (Evans-Campbell, 2008). South Asian parents who recently immigrated to Canada demonstrate relatively similar ideas about supervisory neglect as European-descended Canadians (Maiter et al., 2004). These variations highlight that child neglect can be defined in ways that do not include age- and culturally-appropriate independent activities.

Summary of cultural perspectives

In summary, examining cultural beliefs and practices across the world demonstrates wide variations childhood independence and self-reliance, which can be drawn upon when considering Western practices. In the next section we discuss some of the specific benefits that independence has on developmental outcomes.

Benefits of Independence

The review of developmental trajectories and cultural differences affecting children's independence demonstrates that children are capable of exercising independence in ways most current U.S. neglect laws do not allow. Moreover, there are many positive benefits to independence. By the same token, children who have little opportunity for independence may lag in developing the essential skills they need to succeed in life and experience more mental health challenges (Gray et al., 2023). For example, children need opportunities for exploration, unsupervised play, and self-discovery to learn how to self-regulate, make

Children who have little opportunity for independence may lag in developing the essential skills they need to succeed in life and experience more mental health challenges.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

decisions, and solve problems. While there is a link between parental inattention and negative outcomes (Andrews et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2015), there is also emerging research showing a relationship between a lack of childhood independence and negative outcomes (Gray, 2011; Gray et al., 2023). By contrast, children demonstrate positive outcomes when their parents have a good working knowledge of what their children are able to do and let them do it (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). Doucleff (2021) discusses that positive outcomes do not emerge when parents (including herself) constantly intervene and redirect their children. Instead, through observations of other cultural practices, Doucleff (2021) learned that less parental intervention, led to greater confidence, happiness, helpfulness, and fewer tantrums in the children she observed. Gray et al. (2023) review the research on the relationship between participation in independent activities and children's positive mental health outcomes. Research shows that children have more anxiety and depression when they feel they have little control over their lives (i.e., a lower internal locus of control) (Gray et al., 2023). On the flip side, there are positive relationships between independence and development where more time spent in unstructured independent activities leads to better cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes (Gray et al., 2023). We briefly review two areas of research that have extensive literature demonstrating the benefits of children's independent activities, play and mobility.

Benefits of independent play

There are links between independent play and childhood developmental outcomes (Gray, 2011; Gray et al., 2023). Children explore and have opportunities to be creative and learn about themselves and others through unstructured independent play without adults present (Gopnik, 2016; Gray, 2011; Gray et al., 2023). Play promotes problem solving skills, creativity, and conflict resolution, all in the relative safety of a game or imagined setting. Independent play has benefits for social skills as it allows children to create a sense of community (Gray, 2013; Hooper et al., 2015). For example, in Italy, children who engage in more independent play also spend more time engaged in peer activities (Prezza et al., 2001). Other research found that children's unsupervised play in the neighborhood fostered a greater sense of community, belonging, and social connection, which had a positive impact on their well-being as adults (Hooper et al., 2015; Rogers, 2012). Research has found a direct relationship between early play and later social competence. Children who engaged in rough and tumble play showed higher degrees of social competence later while children deprived of opportunities to play show less flexibility later (Gopnick, 2016). Outdoor play that might be risky, such as climbing a tree, is overall beneficial for children's development as well (Brussoni et al., 2015; Harper, 2017, 2018). In addition, according to Gopnick (2016) there is a bidirectional relationship between stress and play where stress diminishes children's ability to play, and play diminishes children's susceptibility to stress.

One contributor to the decrease in unsupervised play time for middle- and upper-class children is an increase in structured and scheduled activities (Lareau, 2002). Many

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

parents increasingly view children's leisure time as an opportunity for more adult-led activities, rather than allowing their children unsupervised playtime, which is also beneficial (Lareau, 2002; Schiffrin et al., 2015) and the lack of unstructured play may decrease wellbeing (Gray et al., 2023). Overall, the benefits of independent free play on child development far outweigh the potential risks, yet child neglect laws in most states in the U.S. often do not expressively allow this even if a parent is making reasonable and developmentally appropriate judgments about their child's ability.

Benefits of independent mobility

There is evidence that children's ability to be physically active and to maintain a healthy weight may be related to independent activities (Stone et al., 2014). Children in the U.S. are playing less outdoors, which limits physical activity (Carver et al., 2008). Research also suggests a relationship between childhood obesity and the decline of children's independent travel to school (i.e., active school travel by walking or biking) (Carver et al., 2008). While there has been a decline in children's independent mobility in the U.S., it often varies based on the location and the laws. For example, research in a low-income dense city neighborhood in San Diego found that 64% of 10 and 11-year-old participants on average walked almost half a mile to school at least a few times a week (Jamme et al., 2018), which in some states would be considered illegal. For example, in South Carolina, children were stopped from walking to school alone even though they regularly walked the same path on weekends (Skenazy, 2022).

In addition to the physical benefits of walking, research has found that independent mobility has positive impact on other domains, including cognitive skills (Berasategi et al., 2021; Cornell et al., 2001). For example, research has demonstrated that children who walked to school developed a better understanding of their environment and neighborhoods, improving spatial skills, and their sense of community (Hooper et al., 2015; Jamme et al., 2018; Joshi et al., 1999; Rissotto & Tonucci, 2002; Tranter & Pawson, 2001). Generally, children's ability to travel unsupervised is itself a developmental outcome that is a result of a gradual process of the child learning safety skills and having the chance to practice them (Crawford et al., 2017). Being unsupervised is a necessary part of that practice and developmental process. For healthy, positive development, children need a balance of safety and adventure (Brendtro, 2016; Brendtro & Strother, 2007; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011).

Balancing and Managing Risks in Parenting

A perennial challenge for parents is balancing the need to supervise their children and provide them with opportunities for independence. The goal is to avoid the extremes of neglect or overprotection. Complicating all this is the fact that children's ability to be independent is always evolving, therefore parents need to adapt their expectations and children's experiences in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

There has been a cultural shift in parenting in the U.S. where there is an increased focus on children's safety at all costs and striving to minimize all risk (Pimentel, 2012, 2015). The cultural shifts regarding the supervision of children are also directly

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

related to judgments about morality (Thomas et al., 2016). These judgments are made based on belief systems, rather than the actual level of risk (Thomas et al., 2016). As discussed above, culture influences parents' understanding of neglect and risk, just as much as it influences their beliefs about childhood and development (Fontes, 2005). A review of the literature suggests that a balance between giving independence and supervising activities is crucial for the development of children's well-being (Miconi et al., 2018).

Research has shown that risk aversion leads parents to make decisions that are not always rooted in facts or what might be best for their child developmentally. For example, parents list "stranger danger" concerns just about on par with fears of traffic, when it comes to allowing their child to walk to school, even though "stranger dangers" are far less likely (Joshi & Maclean, 1995). In addition, the belief that unsupervised children are at great risk of abduction causes inappropriate assessments of risk. The reality is that children are much more likely to be harmed in a car accident or from fires or smoke inhalation than be abducted (Cairns, 2009; Pimentel, 2015; Wodda, 2018). More recent research found that parents often feel conflicted in making decisions about things like letting their child travel to places on their own, because they are concerned about safety, but at the same time, they would like their child to have the opportunity to develop their independence (Fotel & Thomsen, 2002).

Parenting, however, should not focus on risk aversion, but on risk *management* (Pimentel, 2015). Parents can make this shift through habituation, the experience of diminishing an emotional response through repeated exposure to an experience (Cloutier et al., 2011). Parents are more likely to accept risk as they begin to allow their children to have independent experiences. On the flip side, when parents spend more time transporting and supervising their children, they have less of an opportunity to become habituated to the risk associated with allowing their children to be unsupervised (Cloutier et al., 2011). No action is free from risk. However, attempting to protect a child from all risks prevents the child from learning how to deal with them and perpetuates parents' fear-based beliefs.

Increasingly punitive and pervasive application of neglect laws and policies has likely also created changes in children's experiences and parents' beliefs about what is important developmentally. It is not surprising that parents might be hesitant to have their children walk home alone if it could lead to neglect allegations or criminal charges. Reported stories of children stopped from engaging in independent activities can create a vicious cycle for parents as it reinforces the perception that walking to school is dangerous and that only neglectful (or immoral) parents allow this (Jamme et al., 2018). Similarly, policies that forbid children from using libraries on their own until they are 10 or 12 years old (Skenazy, 2009b) would obviously deter parents and children from the experience of children exploring their interests in books on their own. Rules and practices like these have perpetuated the idea that children need constant line-of-sight supervision from an adult until they reach teen years or young adulthood but leave them increasingly unprepared for independence because they have been denied practice (Haidt & Skeanzy, 2017).

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

How Developmental Research Can Inform Policies

Based on our review of the developmental science literature, there is reason to believe most children benefit from some degree of independence by the time they are 5–6 years old. By this age, children can and should begin to experience independence through activities such as playing outside, riding bicycles, or walking to school (at first with an adult or older siblings helping them to prepare) so that they build the skills they will need for even more growth and development. Laws, policies, and practices need to be amended so that parents can make sound judgments about their own children's readiness for independence. Particularly problematic are the laws that set age limits for independent or unsupervised activities. Specific limits on the age a child can start doing things on their own are likely to create a problem of over-inclusion of children who are capable of independence and possible under-inclusion of children who are not yet able to exercise independence. Moreover, an arbitrary age determined by lawmakers may deter beneficial independence for children whose parents know they are ready for it. Indeed, allowing governmental authorities to enforce "inadequate supervision" neglect laws against families who are engaged in raising healthy and resilient children is stifling, not supporting children and family health and well-being, and not protecting children.

Allowing governmental authorities to enforce "inadequate supervision" neglect laws against families who are engaged in raising healthy and resilient children is stifling, not supporting...

Laws should recognize that adult supervision is only essential when the lack of it subjects children to obvious, tangible, significant dangers that the child is not equipped to navigate given their developmental abilities and experience. In the next section, we discuss recommendations for parents and caregivers for determining when their child can be unsupervised in certain activities. In addition, we suggest policy-centered steps for legislators, legislative staff, program administrators and policymakers that balance what is developmentally appropriate for children and supports sound parenting judgments, while also protecting the children that may be at risk for harm. We conclude with recommendations for our own cohort of developmental scientists and the role they can play in aligning law and policy with research and understanding of child development.

For parents and caregivers

There isn't one simple observation that parents and caregivers or CPS caseworkers can make to test if a child is ready for independence. However, there are many things that parents can do to prepare children for these opportunities and to work with children to determine what they are ready to handle.

- Pay attention to children's developmental level including their evolving skills in the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional spheres and work to allow experiences that meet that level.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

- Create safe opportunities for independent free play without an adult present. Create opportunities for play with children of other ages. Allow older children to develop skills by looking after and modeling for younger children.
- Allow children to contribute to their various communities through chores and helping.
- Engage in dialog with children where they can discuss what they feel ready to do, listen to their opinions, and respect that they may be ready to do more things than you expect.
- Teach your child who to contact in case of a problem.
- Before your child walks independently from one location to another, walk that route with them discussing potential unsafe situations and what to do. Teach children they can talk to anyone, but not go off with anyone. This reinforces the idea that they can learn to seek help from people they don't know and develop their own senses of trust or mistrust.
- Understand that child rearing constantly requires risk management, but that undue risk aversion is not "risk free" for children. Work to balance concerns about risk with the understanding of the benefits of independent experiences.
- Consider the benefits of an activity to children's physical, cognitive, and social growth.
- Utilize libraries, park districts, community centers and other places where children enjoy activities. Advocate for steps that community settings (including libraries, park districts, community centers, and parenting networks) can take to balance supervision and independence and limit unnecessary restrictions on when children can participate in activities without a parent. The parent or caregiver voice is crucial in setting the agenda and policies in communities.
- Advocate for policies that support childhood independence. For example, bring the concerns in this paper to the attention of professionals who care for children as that will help promote cultural change that will better support parenting choices. Use resources like parenting books or the non-profit organization Let Grow's website (https://letgrow.org/) for ideas for independent activities your child can engage in and information you can use in striking the right risk management balance for your child and family.

For legislators and advocates

Legislators, legislative staff, and program administrators can take many steps to both advance the ability of children to enjoy the independence that is developmentally appropriate, and to protect the ability of parents to exercise of sound parenting judgments about when children are capable of being unsupervised:

- Follow the lead of the states (at time of publication: Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah) that have amended their neglect laws to make explicit that children's independent activities are expressly excluded from the definition of neglect.
- Remove language in laws and policies that set age limits for independent activities.
- Review state policies and practices governing mandated reporting and reporter education so that calls to the Hotlines do not have the effect of abridging children's independence, absent genuine risk of harm.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

- Support ongoing child development research to further clarify and support the positive developmental trajectories and core developmental skills needed for reasonable independence.
- Advance policy interpretations that support children's capacities for independence based on scientific knowledge rather than presumptions about inabilities of children due to age alone. Examine bias about childrearing practices through trainings on bias toward parents, including respect for cultural and racial differences.
- Consult with nonpartisan advocacy agencies, such as Let Grow and other child and family policy advocates, for coordination and oversight on passing amendments to legislation.
- Provide funding for community-based programs that support childhood independence. Ensure schools, parks, libraries, and community centers promote policies and programs that give children more opportunities for exploration, creativity and problem solving without adult supervision.
- Ensure that local and state policies do not limit children's access to programs and activities based on unreasonable assumptions about children's developmental level (e.g., library policies that forbid children under age 12 from attending without an adult).

For developmental scientists

More developmental scientists are needed to inform laws and policies about the research on child development. While social media has created a platform for developmental scientists to explain research to the general public, our voices are still often missing from the broader dialog. Our hope is that this manuscript will spur further conversations on this topic and provide specific ways for developmentalists to become involved.

- Conduct theoretical and empirical research related to defining and operationalizing the distinction between severe neglect and benign activities that do not rise to the level of requiring state intrusion or investigation so that policymakers and service providers can devote resources to those children most in need of services and intervention.
- Consider developing an assessment tool like a school-readiness measure to flag when children are ready or not ready for independence.
- Adapt programs of future research that rigorously assess the benefits of childhood independence on developmental outcomes.
- Continue to research parents' perceptions of risk and how these align with actual risk, in order to use data to inform parents' risk management.
- Partner with advocacy organizations at a federal and state level to inform legislation about developmental science research. A first step would be to look up the laws in your state and testify when needed.
- Build community partnerships (e.g., libraries, museums, community centers, schools) to reach and teach parents about these topics and to ensure that the policies of community agencies align with fostering positive child development.
- Join allied professions (psychology, medicine health care, social work, and education) to further robust research and policy development to clarify how make decisions about when children are ready for independence.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Conclusion

This report aims to shed light on the unintended consequences of the laws and policies that may be contributing to a lack of childhood independence, which in turn may hinder development. There are efforts underway across the U.S. at the State level to reform policies to protect children while allowing for reasonable independence. Redleaf (2020a) pointed out that advocating for changing the laws that limit children's independent activities is an issue of social justice that should resonate across party, racial, and class lines. Civic engagement by developmental psychologists and support for a strong, resilient, and competent next generation of children may be increased and strengthened through the application of our professional expertise. A more scientifically supported understanding of how healthy childhood independence is different from neglect can inform current public debates and play a key role in future policy advocacy and education.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the comments on an early draft of this paper by Dr. Peter Gray, research professor, Boston College Psychology Department, co-founding board member of Let Grow, and Lenore Skenazy, co-founding board member and President of Let Grow. We would like to disclose that co-author Diane Redleaf's employment at Family Defense Consulting includes a part-time position as Legal Consultant to Let Grow, a national not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Through her affiliation with Let Grow, Ms. Redleaf has coordinated legislative drafting, research, and strategic advocacy for the Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas laws discussed in this paper and has also developed the materials cited as the Let Grow Maps Project and the Let Grow Toolkit. Her work on this paper and on the articles cited as Redleaf (2022a, 2022b), were completed through her professional employment with Let Grow.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

References

ABC News. (2015). 'Free range' parents who let kids walk a mile hope to clear record after neglect charges. *ABC News*. https://abc7news.com/free-range-parenting-parents-meitiv-family/543767/

Adolph, K. E., & Hoch, J. E. (2019). Motor development: Embodied, embedded, enculturated, and enabling. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *70*, 141–164.

Ali, A., Pigou, D., Clarke, L., & McLachlan, C. (2017). Literature review on motor skill and physical activity in preschool children in New Zealand. *Advances in Physical Education*, *7*, 10–26.

American Law Institute (ALI). (2019, March 20). *Restatement on children, tentative draft #2 physical neglect at Section 2.24*. Retrieved March 16, 2023 from https://www.ali.org/publications/show/children-and-law/

Amoah, P. A. (2020). Perceptions of neglect and well-being among independent child migrants in Ghana. *Child Indicators Research*, *13*(2), 455–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-019-09678-8

Andrews, K., Dunn, J. R., Prime, H., Duke, E., Atkinson, L., Tiwari, A., & Gonzalez, A. (2021). Effects of household chaos and parental responsiveness on child executive functions: A novel, multi-method approach. *BMC Psychology*, *9*, 147. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-021-00651-1

Arsenio, W. F., & Lemerise, E. A. (2004). Aggression and moral development: Integrating social information processing and moral domain models. *Child Development*, *75*, 987–1002.

Berasategi, N., Legorburu, I., Aliri, J., & Alonso, I. (2021). The 'walking with friends to school' project and its contribution to independent mobility, self-esteem, and happiness. *Children & Society*, *36*(5), 768–778. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12532

Best, J. R., & Miller, P. H. (2010). A developmental perspective on executive function. *Child Development*, *81*(6), 1641–1660. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01499.x

Bevar, L. (2018). An 8-year-old girl was walking her dog on her own—and someone reported her to the police. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2018/08/24/an-8-year-old-girl-was-walking-her-dog-on-her-own-and-someone-reported-her-to-the-police/

Bjorklund, D. F. (2022). *Children's thinking: Cognitive development and individual differences*. Sage Publications.

Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2015). School readiness and self-regulation: A developmental psychobiological approach. *Annual Review Psychology*, *3*(66), 711–731. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015221

Brendtro, L. K. (2016). The dueling needs for safety and adventure. *Thriving*, *1*(4), 1–3.

Brendtro, L. K., & Strother, M. A. (2007). Back to basics through challenge and adventure. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, *16*(1), 2–6.

Bristow, J. (2014). The double bind of parenting culture: Helicopter parents and cotton wool kids. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, J. Macvarish, & J. Bristow (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 200–215). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 1, 5th ed.). Wiley.

Brown, B., Mackett, R., Gong, Y., Kitazawa, K., & Paskins, J. (2008). Gender differences in children's pathways to independent mobility. *Children's Geographies*, *6*(4), 385–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280802338080

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Brown, J. (2022). Colorado lawmakers want to spell it out: It's perfectly legal for kids to play outside or walk to school alone. *Colorado Sun*. https://coloradosun.com/2022/02/18/child-abuse-neglect-play-outside/

Brussoni, M., Gibbons, R., Gray, C., Ishikawa, T., Sandseter, E., Bienenstock, A., Chabot, G., Fuselli, P., Herrington, S., Janssen, I., Pickett, W., Power, M., Stanger, N., Sampson, M., & Tremblay, M. (2015). What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *12*(6), 6423–6454. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph120606423

Cairns, W. (2009). *How to live dangerously: The hazards of helmets, the benefits of bacteria, and the risks of living too safe*. St. Martin's Griffin.

Caldwell, J., & Sinha, V. (2020). (Re) Conceptualizing neglect: Considering the overrepresentation of indigenous children in child welfare systems in Canada. *Child Indicators Research*, *13*(2), 481–512. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-019-09676-w

Carver, A., Timperio, A., & Crawford, D. (2008). Playing it safe: The influence of neighbourhood safety on children's physical activity—A review. *Health & place*, *14*(2), 217–227.

CBS Chicago. (2015). Mother cleared of neglect for letting kids play outside alone. *CBS Chicago*. https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2015/12/16/mother-cleared-of-neglect-for-letting-kids-play-outside-alone/

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Public law 93–247. (1974).

Chua, A. (2011). *Battle hymn of the tiger mother*. Bloomsbury publishing.

Cloutier, M.-S., Bergeron, J., & Apparicio, P. (2011). Predictors of parental risk perceptions: The case of child pedestrian injuries in school context: Predictors of parental risk perceptions. *Risk Analysis*, *31*(2), 312–323. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.2010.01501.x

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (n.d.). What is the CASEL Framework? *CASEL*. https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/

Colorado House Bill 22-1090. (2022). Public law. https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1090

Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Slominski, L. (2006). Preschool instruction and children's emergent literacy growth. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *98*(4), 665.

Coohey, C. (2003). Defining and classifying supervisory neglect. *Child Maltreatment*, *8*(2), 145–156.

Coppens, A. D., Alcalá, L., Rogoff, B., & Mejía-Arauz, R. (2016). Children's contributions in family work: Two cultural paradigms. In S. Punch, R. Vanderbeck, & T. Skelton (Eds.), *Families, Intergenerationality, and Peer Group Relations* (pp. 1–27). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-92-7_11-2

Cornell, E. H., Hadley, D. C., Sterling, T. M., Chan, M. A., & Boechler, P. (2001). Adventure as a stimulus for cognitive development. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *21*(3), 219–231. https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.2001.0207

Corriveau, K., Harris, P. L., Meins, E., et al. (2009). Young children's trust in their mothers' claims: Longitudinal links with attachment security in infancy. *Child Development*, *80*, 750–761. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1017/CBO9780511750946.005

Crawford, S. B., Bennetts, S. K., Hackworth, N. J., Green, J., Graesser, H., Cooklin, A. R., Matthews, J., Strazdins, L., Zubrick, S. R., D'Esposito, F., & Nicholson, J. M. (2017). Worries, 'weirdos', neighborhoods and knowing people: A qualitative study with children and parents regarding children's independent mobility. *Health & Place*, *45*, 131–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.03.005

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Crick, N. R., & Dodge, K. A. (1994). A review and reformulation of social information processing mechanisms in children's social adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, *115*, 74–101.

Davis, H. E., & Cashdan, E. (2020). You don't have to know where your kids are, just where they aren't: Exploring free-range parenting in the Bolivian Amazon. In B. K. Ashdown & A. N. Faherty (Eds.), *Parents and Caregivers Across Cultures* (pp. 59–74). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35590-6_5

Denham, S. A. (1998). *Emotional development in young children*. Guilford.

Denham, S. A. (2019). Emotional competence during childhood and adolescence. In V. LoBue, K. Pérez-Edgar, & K. A. Buss (Eds.), *Handbook of emotional development* (pp. 493–541). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17332-6_20

Denham, S. A., Blair, K. A., DeMulder, E., Levitas, J., Sawyer, K., Auerbach–Major, S., & Queenan, P. (2003). Preschool emotional competence: Pathway to social competence? *Child Development*, *74*(1), 238–256. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00533

Doucleff, M. (2021). *Hunt, gather, parent: What ancient cultures can teach us about the lost art of raising happy, helpful little humans*. Simon and Schuster.

Dubowitz, H., Kobulsky, J. M., & Proctor, L. J. (2022). Recent research on child neglect. In R. D. Krugman & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (Vol. 14, pp. 35–64). Springer International Publishing.

Edwards, C. P., & Liu, W.-L. (2002). Parenting toddlers. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Children and parenting* (pp. 45–71). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Eisenberg, N. (2000). Emotion, regulation, and moral development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *51*(1), 665. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.51.1.665

Eisenberg, N., Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., & Spinrad, T. L. (2015). The development of prosocial behavior. In D. A. Schroeder & W. G. Graziano (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of prosocial behavior* (pp. 114–136). Oxford University Press. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-47040-006

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., & Spinrad, T. (2006). Prosocial development. In W. Damon & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 3, 6th ed.). Wiley.

Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Perceptions of child neglect among urban American Indian/Alaska native parents. *Child Welfare*, *87*, 115–142.

Fisher, A., Reilly, J. J., Kelly, L. A., Montgomery, C., Williamson, A., Paton, J. Y., & Grant, S. (2005). Fundamental movement skills and habitual physical activity in young children. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, *37*(4), 684–688.

Flavell, J. H. (2004). Theory-of-mind development: Retrospect and prospect. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, *50*, 274–290.

Fontes, L. A. (2005). *Child abuse and culture: Working with diverse families*. Guilford Press.

Fotel, T., & Thomsen, T. U. (2002). The surveillance of children's mobility. *Surveillance & Society*, *1*(4), 535–554. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v1i4.3335

Foulkes, J. D., Knowles, Z., Fairclough, S. J., Stratton, G., O'dwyer, M., Ridgers, N. D., & Foweather, L. (2015). Fundamental movement skills of preschool children in Northwest England. *Perceptual and Motor skills*, *121*(1), 260–283.

Frost, J. L., Wortham, S. C., & Reifel, S. (2012). *Play and child development* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Fry, N. (2022). The gentle thrills of "Old Enough!," a show about toddlers running errands. *The New Yorker*. www.newyorker.com/culture/on-television/the-gentle-thrills-of-old-enough-a-show-about-toddlers-running-errands

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Fuller, C., & Redleaf, D. (2015). *When can parents let children be alone?* The Family Defense Center. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2643804

Furth, H. G. (1996). *Desire for society: Children's knowledge as social imagination* (pp. 149–173). Plenum.

Futterman Collier, A., McClure, F. H., Collier, J., Otto, C., & Polloi, A. (1999). Culture-specific views of child maltreatment and parenting styles in a Pacific-Island community. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *23*(3), 229–244. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(98)00129-X

Fyhri, A., Hjorthol, R., Mackett, R. L., Fotel, T. N., & Kyttä, M. (2011). Children's active travel and independent mobility in four countries: Development, social contributing trends and measures. *Transport Policy*, *18*(5), 703–710. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2011.01.005

Gauvain, M. (2022). *Cognitive development in infancy and childhood*. Cambridge University Press.

Gauvain, M., & Perez, S. M. (2007). The socialization of cognition. In *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research* (pp. 588–613). The Guilford Press.

Ghandour, R. M., Moore, K. A., Murphy, K., Bethell, C., Jones, J. R., Harwood, R., Buerlein, J., Kogan, M., & Lu, M. (2019). School readiness among U.S. children: Development of a pilot measure. *Child Indicators Research*, *12*, 1389–1411. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9586-8

Gleitman, L. R., Liberman, M. Y., McLemore, C. A., & Partee, B. H. (2019). The impossibility of language acquisition (and how they do it). *Annual Review of Linguistics*, *5*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-011718-011640

Glenwright, M., & Pexman, P. M. (2010). Development of children's ability to distinguish sarcasm and verbal irony. *Journal of Child Language*, *37*(2), 429–451. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000909009520

Goodnow, J. J., Cashmore, J., Cotton, S., & Knight, R. (1984). Mothers' developmental timetables in two cultural groups. *International Journal of Psychology*, *19*(1–4), 193–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207598408247526

Gopnick, A. (2016). *The gardener and the carpenter: What the new science of child development tells us about the relationship between parents and children*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and rise of psychopathology in childhood and adolescence. *American Journal of Play*, *3*, 443–463. https://www.psychologytoday.com/files/attachments/1195/ajp-decline-play-published.pdf

Gray, P. (2013). *Free to learn: Why unleashing the instinct to play will make our children happier, more self-reliant, and better students for life*. Basic Books.

Gray, P., Lancy, D. F., & Bjorklund, D. F. (2023). Decline in independent activity as a cause of decline in children's mental wellbeing: Summary of evidence. *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Greene, K. M., Hynes, K., & Doyle, E. A. (2011). Self-care among school-aged children of immigrants. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(5), 783–789. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.11.023

Grégoire-Labrecque, G., Lafantaisie, V., Trocmé, N., Lacharité, C., Li, P., Audet, G., Sullivan, R., & Ruiz-Casares, M. (2020). 'Are We Talking as Professionals or as Parents?' Complementary views on supervisory neglect among professionals working with families in Quebec, Canada. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *118*, 105407. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105407

Gupta-Kagan, J. (2022). Confronting indeterminacy and bias in child protection laws. *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, *33*(2), 217–287. https://law.stanford.edu/publications/confronting-indeterminacy-and-bias-in-child-protection-law/

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Haidt, J., & Skenazy, L. (2017). The fragile generation: Bad policy and paranoid parenting are making kids too safe to succeed. *Reason*. https://reason.com/2017/10/26/the-fragile-generation/

Harkness, S., Super, C. M., Mavridis, C. J., Barry, O., & Zeitlin, M. (2013). Culture and early childhood development: Implications for policy and programs. In *Handbook of early childhood development research and its impact on global policy* (pp. 142–160). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199922994.001.0001

Harper, N. J. (2017). Outdoor risky play and healthy child development in the shadow of the "risk society": A forest and nature school perspective. *Child & Youth Services*, *38*(4), 318–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2017.1412825

Harper, N. J. (2018). Reframing risk as a developmental need. *Thriving*, *3*(4), 1–4.

Harris, P. L., Donnelly, K., Guz, G. R., & Pitt-Watson, R. (1986). Children's understanding of the distinction between real and apparent emotion. *Child Development*, *57*(4), 895–909. https://doi.org/10.2307/1130366

Hooper, C. M., Ivory, V. C., & Fougere, G. (2015). Childhood neighbourhoods as third places: Developing durable skills and preferences that enhance wellbeing in adulthood. *Health & Place*, *34*, 34–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.03.017

Jamme, H. T. W., Bahl, D., & Banerjee, T. (2018). Between "broken windows" and the "eyes on the street:" Walking to school in inner city San Diego. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *55*, 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2018.01.004

Joshi, M. S., & Maclean, M. (1995). Parental attitudes to children's journeys to school. *World Transport Policy and Practice*, *1*(4), 29–36.

Joshi, M. S., & Maclean, M. (1997). Maternal expectations of child development in India, Japan, and England. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *28*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022197282005

Joshi, M. S., Maclean, M., & Carter, W. (1999). Children's journey to school: Spatial skills, knowledge and perceptions of the environment. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *17*(1), 125–139. https://doi.org/10.1348/026151099165195

Joyce, A. (2015). What exactly is this whole "free-range kid" thing? *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/05/26/what-exactly-is-this-whole-free-range-kid-thing/

Kagan, S. L., Moore, E., & Bredekamp, S. (1995). *Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary*. National Educational Goals Panel.

Kansas Department for Children and Families. (2012). Factors to consider before leaving a child home alone. http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/pps/documents/ppm_forms/appendices/appendix_1b.pdf

Karasik, L. B., Adolph, K. E., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., & Bornstein, M. H. (2010). WEIRD walking: Cross-cultural research on motor development. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *33*(2–3), 95–96. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X10000117

Kim, H., Wildeman, C., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2017). Lifetime prevalence of investigating child maltreatment among US children. *American Journal of Public Health*, *107*, 274–280.

Kim, S. Y. (2013). What is "tiger" parenting? How does it affect children? *Developmental Psychologist*. https://www.apadivisions.org/division-7/publications/newsletters/developmental/2013/07/tiger-parenting

Kochanska, G., Coy, K., & Murray, K. T. (2001). The development of self-regulation in the first 4 years of life. *Child Development*, *72*(4), 1031–1111.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Kuczmarski, R. J., Ogden, C. L., Grummer-Strawn, L. M., Flegal, K. M., Guo, S. S., Wei, R., Curtin, L. R., Roche, A. F., & Johnson, C. L. (2000). *CDC growth charts: United States* (pp. 1–28). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Kyttä, M., Hirvonen, J., Rudner, J., Pirjola, I., & Laatikainen, T. (2015). The last free-range children? Children's independent mobility in Finland in the 1990s and 2010s. *Journal of Transport Geography*, *47*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2015.07.004

Kyttä, M., Oliver, M., Ikeda, E., Ahmadi, E., Omiya, I., & Laatikainen, T. (2018). Children as urbanites: Mapping the affordances and behavior settings of urban environments for Finnish and Japanese children. *Children's Geographies*, *16*(3), 319–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2018.1453923

Lagattuta, K. H., & Thompson, R. A. (2007). The development of self-conscious emotions: Cognitive processes and social influences. In J. L. Tracy, R. W. Robins, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *The self-conscious emotions: Theory and research* (pp. 91–113). Guilford Press.

Laird, S. E. (2016). 'If parents are punished for asking their children to feed goats': Supervisory neglect in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Social Work*, *16*(3), 303–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017315572037

Lansford, J. E., Godwin, J., Uribe Tirado, L. M., Zelli, A., Al-Hassan, S. M., Bacchini, D., Bombi, A. S., Bornstein, M. H., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Di Giunta, L., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., & Alampay, L. P. (2015). Individual, family, and culture level contributions to child physical abuse and neglect: A longitudinal study in nine countries. *Development and Psychopathology*, *27*(4 pt 2), 1417–1428. https://doi.org/10.1017/S095457941500084X

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in Black families and White families. *American Sociological Review*, *67*(5), 747. https://doi.org/10.2307/3088916

Lawrence, J. F., Hinga, B. M., Mahoney, J. L., & Vandell, D. L. (2015). Summer activities and vocabulary development: Relationships across middle childhood and adolescence. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education*, *3*(1), 71–93. https://doi.org/10.3224/ijree.v3i1.19582

Let Grow. (2020). *Testimony in favor of reasonable childhood independence laws*. https://letgrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Testimony-in-Favor-of-Reasonable-Childhood-Independence-Laws-1.pdf

Let Grow. (n.d.a). Maps project. https://letgrow.org/resources/state-policy-maps/

Let Grow. (n.d.b). Let grow legislative toolkit. https://letgrow.org/legislative-toolkit/

Longley, R. (2021, August 9). What is parens patriae? Definition and examples. ThoughtCo. Retrieved March 16, 2023 from https://thoughtco.com/parens-patriae-definition-examples-4588615

Maiter, S., Alaggia, R., & Trocmé, N. (2004). Perceptions of child maltreatment by parents from the Indian Subcontinent: Challenging myths about culturally based abusive parenting practices. *Child Maltreatment*, *9*(3), 309–324. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559504266800

Malone, K., & Rudner, J. (2011). Global perspectives on children's independent mobility: A sociocultural comparison and theoretical discussion of children's lives in four countries in Asia and Africa. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *1*(3), 243–259. https://doi.org/10.2304/gsch.2011.1.3.243

Markus, H. J., & Nurius, P. S. (1984). Self-understanding and self-regulation in middle childhood. In *Development during middle childhood: The years from six to twelve* (pp. 147–183).

Maxwell, K. L., & Clifford, R. M. (2004). School readiness assessment. *Young Children*, *59*(1), 42–46.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Meyer v. State of Nebraska. (n.d.). Oyez. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/262us390

Miconi, D., Beeman, I., Robert, E., Beatson, J., & Ruiz-Casares, M. (2018). Child supervision in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *89*, 226–242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.04.040

Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2023). Minnesota child maltreatment intake, screening, and response path guidelines. https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-5144-ENG

Moriarpy, Era. (2022). Fostering tragedy: Experts say system designed to protect children can break up families. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/experts-say-a-system-designed-to-protect-children-is-breaking-up-families/

Morrison Institute for Public Policy. (2017). *Child neglect in Arizona: Prevalence of neglect types reported to Arizona's Department of Child Safety for calendar years 2013–2015*. Arizona State University. https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/neglect_analysis_v10.pdf

Morrongiello, B. A., & Cox, A. (2020). Issues in defining and measuring supervisory neglect and conceptualizing prevention. *Child Indicators Research*, *13*(2), 369–385. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-019-09653-3

Morton, T. D., & Salovitz, B. (2006). Evolving a theoretical model of child safety in maltreating families. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *12*(30), 1317–1327.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Parenting matters: Supporting parents of children ages 0–8*. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/21868

Neufeld, S., Wright, S. M., & Gaut, J. (2002). Not raising a "bubble kid": Farm parents' attitudes and practices regarding the employment, training and supervision of their children. *The Journal of Rural Health*, *18*(1), 57–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-0361.2002.tb00877.x

Obee, P., Sandseter, E. B. H., Gerlach, A., & Harper, N. J. (2021). Lessons learned from Norway on risky play in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *49*(1), 99–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01044-6

Ochs, E., & Izquierdo, C. (2009). Responsibility in childhood: Three developmental trajectories. *Ethos*, *37*(4), 391–413. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2009.01066.x

Oklahoma House Bill 2565. (2021). http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb2565%26Session=2100

O'Malley, S. (2015). *Cotton wool kids: What's making Irish parents paranoid?* Mercier Press Ltd.

Payne, G. V., Isaacs, L. D., & Isaacs, L. D. (2016). *Human motor development: A lifespan approach* (9th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315213040

Payton, J. W., Wardlaw, D. M., Graczyk, P. A., Bloodworth, M. R., Tompsett, C. J., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Social and emotional learning: A framework for promoting mental health and reducing risk behavior in children and youth. *Journal of School Health*, *70*(5), 179–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2000.tb06468.x

Pimentel, D. (2012). Criminal child neglect and the free-range kid: Is overprotective parenting the new standard of care? *Utah Law Review*, *2*, 947–999.

Pimentel, D. (2015). Fearing the Bogeyman: How the legal system's overreaction to perceived danger threatens families and children. *Pepperdine Law Review*, *42*(2), 235–292.

Pimentel, D. (2019). Punishing families for being poor: How child protection interventions threaten the right to parent while impoverished. *Oklahoma Law Review*, *71*, 885.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Prezza, M., Pilloni, S., Morabito, C., Sersante, C., Alparone, F. R., & Giuliani, M. V. (2001). The influence of psychosocial and environmental factors on children's independent mobility and relationship to peer frequentation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *11*(6), 435–450. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.643

Proctor, L. J., & Dubowitz, H. (2014). Child neglect: Challenges and controversies. In J. E. Korbin & R. D. Krugman (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (Vol. 2, pp. 27–61). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7208-3_2

Pruden, S. M., Nazareth, A., Odean, R., Abad, C., Bravo, E., & Garcia, N. (2019). Movement, space, and the development of spatial thinking. In *The encyclopedia of child and adolescent development* (pp. 1–15). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Putnick, D. L., Bornstein, M. H., Lansford, J. E., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Di Giunta, L., Gurdal, S., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P. O., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., Tirado, L. M. U., Zelli, A., Alampay, L. P., Al-Hassan, S. M., Bacchini, D., & Bombi, A. S. (2012). Agreement in mother and father acceptance-rejection, warmth, and hostility/rejection/neglect of children across nine countries. *Cross-Cultural Research*, *46*(3), 191–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397112440931

Redleaf, D. L. (2020a). Narrowing neglect laws means ending state-mandated helicopter parenting. *ABA Children's Rights Litigation Journal*. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2020/fall2020-narrowing-neglect-laws-means-ending-state-mandated-helicopter-parenting//

Redleaf, D. L. (2020b). Where is it safe and legal to give children reasonable independence? *ABA Children's Rights Litigation Journal*. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2020/where-is-it-safe-and-legal-to-give-children-reasonable-independence/

Redleaf, D. L. (2020c, September 24) "During a routine child services check, cops hog-tied a mom and carried her out 'Like a Pig Upside Down," Reason.Com. https://reason.com/2020/09/24/aurora-police-hogtied-child-services-abuse/

Redleaf, D. L. (2022). The challenge of changing amorphous, limitless neglect laws in a family surveillance society. *Family Integrity & Justice Quarterly*, *1*(2), 120–131. https://publications.pubknow.com/view/1055841541/

Rissotto, A., & Tonucci, F. (2002). Freedom of movement and environmental knowledge in elementary school children. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *22*(1–2), 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.2002.0243

Roberts, D. (2022). *Torn apart: How the child welfare system destroys black families—and how abolition can build a safety world*. Basic Books.

Rogers, M. (2012). "They are there for you": The importance of neighbourhood friends to children's well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, *5*(3), 483–502. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-012-9146-6

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press Inc., ProQuest Ebook Central. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfsu/detail.action?docID=272865

Rogoff, B., Sellers, M. J., Pirrotta, S., Fox, N., & White, S. H. (1975). Age of assignment of roles and responsibilities to children: A cross-cultural survey. *Human Development*, *18*(5), 353–369. https://doi.org/10.1159/000271496

Ronfard, S., & Lane, J. D. (2018). Preschoolers continually adjust their epistemic trust based on an informant's ongoing accuracy. *Child Development*, *89*, 414–429. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12720

Ruiz-Casares, M., & Heymann, J. (2009). Children home alone unsupervised: Modeling parental decisions and associated factors in Botswana, Mexico, and Vietnam. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *33*(5), 312–323. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.09.010

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Ruiz-Casares, M., Nazif-Muñoz, J., Iwo, R., & Oulhote, Y. (2018). Nonadult supervision of children in low- and middle-income countries: Results from 61 national population-based surveys. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *15*(8), 1564. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15081564

Ruiz-Casares, M., Trocmé, N., & Fallon, B. (2012). Supervisory neglect and risk of harm. Evidence from the Canadian Child Welfare System. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *36*(6), 471–480. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.03.005

Rutherford, M. B. (2011). *Adult supervision required: Private freedom and public constraints for parents and children*. Rutgers University Press.

Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *9*(2), 147470491100900. https://doi.org/10.1177/147470491100900212

Schiffrin, H. H., Godfrey, H., Liss, M., & Erchull, M. J. (2015). Intensive parenting: Does it have the desired impact on child outcomes? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *24*(8), 2322–2331. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-0035-0

Schoeppe, S., Duncan, M. J., Badland, H. M., Rebar, A. L., & Vandelanotte, C. (2016). Too far from home? Adult attitudes on children's independent mobility range. *Children's Geographies*, *14*(4), 482–489. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2015.1116685

Scott, D., Higgins, D., & Franklin, R. (2012). The role of supervisory neglect in childhood injury. *Child Family Community Australia*, *8*, 1–10.

Shaw, B., Bicket, M., Elliott, B., Fagan-Watson, B., Mocca, E., & Hillman, M. (2015). *Children's independent mobility: An international comparison and recommendations for action* (pp. 1–94). Policy Studies Institute.

Skenazy, L. (2009a). *Free-range kids, giving our children the freedom we had without going nuts with worry*. John Wiley & Sons.

Skenazy, L. (2009b). Outrage of the week: No one under 12 allowed in Library! (Without Guardian). *Free-Range Kids*. https://www.freerangekids.com/outrage-of-the-week-no-one-under-12-allowed-in-library-without-guardian/

Skenazy, L. (2015). I let my 9-year-old ride the subway alone. I got labeled the 'world's worst mom'. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/16/i-let-my-9-year-old-ride-the-subway-alone-i-got-labeled-the-worlds-worst-mom/

Skenazy, L. (2022). Mom handcuffed, jailed for letting 14-year-old babysit kids during COVID-19. *Reason*. https://reason.com/2022/02/08/melissa-henderson-babysit-covid-arrest-blairsville/

Skenazy, L. (n.d.a). 9-Year-old testifies on behalf of South Carolina's free-range parenting bill. https://letgrow.org/9-year-old-testifies-on-behalf-of-south-carolinas-free-range-parenting-bill/

Skenazy, L. (n.d.b). 6-year-old testifies: "If I couldn't play outside alone, I'd be mad". https://letgrow.org/6-year-old-testifies/

South Carolina House Bill 79. (2019). 123rd session. https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess123_2019-2020/bills/79.htm

St. George, D. (2015). Report: Parenting decisions too often touch off neglect investigations. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/report-parenting-decisions-too-often-touch-off-neglect-investigations/2015/08/06/ac5457b4-3b8a-11e5-8e98-115a3cf7d7ae_story.html

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

St. George, D., & Schulte, B. (2015, April 5). Parents rally around 'free-range family' with petitions, protest plans. Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/parents-rally-around-free-range-family-with-petitions-protest-plans/2015/04/15/1e96963c-e381-11e4-b510-962fcfabc310_story.html

Stone, M. R., Faulkner, G. E., Mitra, R., & Buliung, R. N. (2014). The freedom to explore: Examining the influence of independent mobility on weekday, weekend and after-school physical activity behaviour in children living in urban and inner-suburban neighbourhoods of varying socioeconomic status. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *11*(1), 1–11.

Straus, M. A., & Kantor, G. K. (2005). Definition and measurement of neglectful behavior: Some principles and guidelines. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *29*(1), 19–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.08.005

Suizzo, M.-A. (2007). Parents' goals and values for children: Dimensions of independence and interdependence across four U.S. ethnic groups. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *38*(4), 506–530. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022107302365

Sunarty, K., & Dirawan, D. G. (2015). Development parenting model to increase the independence of children. *International Education Studies*, *8*(10), 1–213.

Super, C. M., & Harkness, S. (1986). The developmental niche: A conceptualization at the interface of child and culture. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *9*(4), 545–569.

Texas House Bill 567. (2021). House Bill 567. https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R%26Bill=HB567

Thomas, A. J., Stanford, P. K., & Sarnecka, B. W. (2016). No child left alone: Moral judgments about parents affect estimates of risk to children. *Collabra*, *2*(1), 10. https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.33

Tranter, P., & Pawson, E. (2001). Children's access to local environments: A case-study of Christchurch, New Zealand. *Local Environment*, *6*(1), 27–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/13549830120024233

Troxel v. Granville. (n.d.). *Oyez*. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from https://www.oyez.org/cases/1999/99-138

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Child maltreatment 2020. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-maltreatment-2020

Ulrich, D. A., & Sanford, C. B. (2000). TGMD-2: Test of gross motor development. Pro-ed.

Utah. (2018). S.B. 65 child neglect amendments. https://le.utah.gov/%7E2018/bills/static/SB0065.html

Uttal, D. H., Fisher, J. A., & Taylor, H. A. (2006). Words and maps: Developmental changes in mental models of spatial information acquired from descriptions and depictions. *Developmental Science*, *9*(2), 221–235. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2006.00481.x

Uttal, D. H., Meadow, N. G., Tipton, E., Hand, L. L., Alden, A. R., Warren, C., & Newcombe, N. S. (2013). The malleability of spatial skills: A meta-analysis of training studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(2), 352–402. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028446

Uttal, D. H., & Wellman, H. M. (1989). Young children's representation of spatial information acquired from maps. *Developmental Psychology*, *25*(1), 128–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.25.1.128

Wodda, A. (2018). Stranger Danger! *Journal of Family Strengths*, *18*(1), 1–34.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Washington Post. (n.d.). Latchkey children age restrictions by state. Washington Post. https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/local/latchkey-children-age-restrictions-by-state/1555/

Wellman, H. M. (2014). *Making minds: How theory of mind develops*. Oxford University Press.

Wellman, H. M., Cross, D., & Watson, J. (2001). Meta-analysis of theory-of-mind development: The truth about false belief. *Child Development 72*, 3, 655–684. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00304

Wellman, H. M., & Lagattuta, K. H. (2000). Developing understandings of mind. In S. Baron-Cohen, H. Tager-Flusberg, & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Understanding other minds: Perspectives from developmental cognitive neuroscience* (2nd ed., pp. 21–49). Oxford University Press.

Zelazo, P. D. (2015). Executive function: Reflection, iterative reprocessing, complexity, and the developing brain. *Developmental Review*, *38*, 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12412

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Author Bios

Rachel M. Flynn, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Development at San Francisco State University. She received her BS in Biopsychology and Cognitive Science from the University of Michigan, her MA in Clinical Psychology "Psychology in Education" from Columbia University, Teacher's College, and her PhD in Developmental Psychology from the University of California, Riverside (UCR). She completed postdoctoral trainings at New York University at the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research in the School of Social Work and in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Steinhardt. Prior to her appointment at SFSU she was a Research Assistant Professor in Medical Social Sciences at Northwestern University, and the Associate Director for the Institute for Innovations in Developmental Sciences. Her dissertation was funded by UCR's Dissertation Year Program Fellowship and Graduate Dean's Dissertation Research Grant, and the Foundation for Digital Games. In 2019, she received an Early Career Fellowship in Middle Childhood Education & Development from the American Educational Research Association and Society for Research in Child Development. Dr. Flynn also spent 10 years directing and managing youth development programs for children living in poverty-impacted communities and attending under-resourced schools in New York City.

Nicholas J. Shaman, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Psychology the University of Houston – Clear Lake. He received is BA in Psychology and Religious Studies from Boston University and his PhD in Developmental Psychology from the University of California, Riverside. He has received the Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality's Research Seed Grant and the UCR Graduate Dean's Dissertation Research Grant. Dr. Shaman has also worked on project funded by the Social Science Research Council and Templeton Foundation on children's religious cognitions. Recently, he is a guest editor for the journal *Religions* for a special issue on Religion and Child Development.

Diane L. Redleaf is an attorney and advocate for policies and practices that protect all families, including especially families of color and families living in poverty whose lives are impacted by the child welfare system. Since she graduated from Stanford Law School in 1979, she has led dozens of successful class action suits and major policy reform, first as a legal services attorney and supervisor and as a partner in a public interest law firm, Lehrer and Redleaf. In 2005 she founded the Chicago non-profit Family Defense Center where she served as Executive Director and Legal Director of the Family Defense Center until 2017. Now the principal of Family Defense Consulting, Redleaf serves as an expert witness, policy leader, author, and legal consultant to Let Grow. Redleaf has taught at the University of Chicago Law School and Loyola Law School. She has won the Chicago Bar Association Alliance for Women's Founder's Award and the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award from her alma mater, Carleton College. She is the author of *They Took the Kids Last Night: How the Child Protection System Puts Families at Risk* (ABC-Clio 2018), and numerous articles, including in The *Atlantic, The Washington Post*, and Reason.com.

23793988, 2023, 1, Downloaded from https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sop2.27, Wiley Online Library on [20/12/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License