

HOW TO RAISE
Analog
KIDS



IN A
DIGITAL
WORLD

*...AND NOT MAKE THEM
HATE YOU FOR IT.*

TOMMY LATHAM

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How to Raise Analog Kids in a Digital World

(AND NOT MAKE THEM HATE YOU FOR IT)

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...Mountain man, Digital artist, and Dad of 10

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Contents

The Road Gap.....	5
Free Range Kids.....	9
The Soul is more Important than the Body.....	17
The Town with the Big Dome	23
From Protecting to Equipping.....	29
Wilderness Therapy.....	33
Keeping up with the Jones Kid.....	45
Kids Don't Need as Much as You Think	51
Raising Farm Kids without a Farm.....	55
One Kernel at a Time	63

CHAPTER 1

The Road Gap

My son Thomas came running inside to tell me.

"Dad, you need to come see what Aidan and Marcus are doing down the driveway!"

"What?"

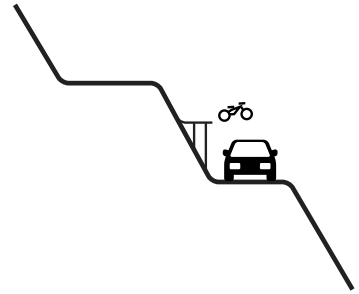
"They have friends over."

"Nothing wrong with that."

"No, Dad, it's *what* they're doing!"

"Oh, do they have guns?"

"No Dad - worse. They're on their *bikes!*"



It was what they called a "Road Gap". As I walked out on that crisp October day, I saw it. It was really a thing of beauty – a log structure jutting out of the hillside in the cutbank of the driveway like the entrance to a mine.

As I looked closer, I saw that it was a ramp... a *launching* ramp. The top was adorned with wood planks, crudely nailed onto the log frame, and the end... well, the end just jutted out into nothingness. We have a split driveway leading up to our hillside home. The upper driveway heads to our house, while the lower fork takes you into the field, just below our house.

They had effectively used the two driveways to create a multi-story bike park feature that would make a Red Bull Rampage rider salivate.

"Dad, it's called the Summerfield Bike Park Road Gap", said Aidan, as he, his brother, and two other friends pushed their bikes up the hill to test it out.

I was already well aware of the fact that they had turned our 10 acres of mountainous hillside into 'Summerfield Bike Park' – mostly because more and more teens were now showing up to ride it, many of whom I didn't even know. "Ride at Your Own Risk and Don't Sue Me I'm Poor" was the message on the crudely made sign I had affixed to the tree at the entrance to the trail with the much better looking sign made by my son that advertised the trail as "Organ Donor".

But back to the road gap. And I'll try to draw an illustration of it and put it here in this chapter.

As four teenagers readied themselves for the descent (with a few girls watching, as well as a few stray younger kids who had wandered over from next door), I decided I should inspect this structure. It was then that I saw a sticker-bombed Subaru parked on the lower driveway, just below the end of the log ramp. "Okay, so the car is there for... *Oh.*"

Aidan yells, "Dropping!" I knew enough to recognize this as the warning that a rider was coming down to hit the feature, so I stood back and watched in both amazement and horror as Aidan, then Marcus, then Ben, then Ethan tore down the trail, rode across the upper driveway, did another drop down to the ramp, launched off it, sailed through the air over Cousin Ben's Subaru on the lower driveway, finally landing 20+ feet further down the hill below, eventually stopping somewhere – who knows where – maybe in the next county.

That was the Road Gap. Just one of many stunts in the life of my kids. My son Marcus would continue on that year to shatter his collarbone while downhill biking, get a titanium plate installed, break the same collarbone again while skiing (bending the plate), get the plate removed, then one more time break this same bone while out "drifting" his car.

My kids have jumped off roofs, gotten a chainsaw injury, accidentally lit their bedroom carpet on fire from indoor fireworks, glacier climbed a stratovolcano in the Cascades, hunted their own dinner, and bucked trees (then loaded in the firewood) to stay warm all winter.

But they don't know how to play Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto, or Fortnite.

And that's just fine with us.

CHAPTER 2

Free Range Kids

I took one of my sons to Home Depot one Saturday morning to get parts for something that had broken again. We walked by one of those woodworking classes where they show city kids how to make cool things with wood and glue. My son asked what they were doing, so I told him. His reply came back, "Dad, that's what I do every day".

Nice.

A paper published in 2023 by Peter Gray, a research professor of neuroscience at Boston College, shows a connection between anxiety and depression in teens and declining rates of independent play among children.

The paper argues that our increasingly structured lifestyles and tendency towards risk aversion in child rearing is depriving our kids of self-directed adventures that build resilience and confidence.

Multiple studies are now supporting the thesis that the rise in mental disorders, anxiety, depression and suicide among young adults over the past several years is largely the result of a decline in opportunities for independent activity – or independent play – when they were young.

Why? Because independent play brings immediate satisfaction to children, and it builds the sort of character traits that allow them to face the bumps in the road of life without falling apart.

It's amazing that many parents clearly recognize this, yet educators, pediatricians, family doctors, child psychiatrists and therapists are not sufficiently aware of the ways that young people's freedom has declined and how that might influence their anxiety and depression. And yet, these are the people that often have the greater possibility of affecting change.

When pediatricians talk with parents, they focus on safety. On health. Wellness. Diet. But they also need to talk about children's needs for some degree of adventure, some degree of risk, some degree of independent activity, and the health benefits that come from those things – namely, the development of the character traits that are necessary to grow in a mentally healthy way.

Now, this part was a bit generalized and deep, so let's get specific. Let's define "independent play" and what those activities look like.

Independent play really means any activity that kids engage in themselves without being in any direct way controlled or monitored by adults. Especially for younger kids – those 12 and under – the primary form of independent activity is play. Just... free... play, either by themselves or with other children, but away from adults.

This is the way that children normally played throughout human history, but in recent times we have been, for various reasons, increasingly preventing them from playing in this manner.

In addition to play, we can include activities such as walking by themselves to school, taking public transportation, doing errands for parents, or having a part-time job. These activities provide children with the opportunity to prove to themselves – and to others – that they are competent enough to do things on their own, that they are reliable, and that they can be trusted.

And yet, these are the things that we have been largely depriving young people of in recent times.

On the other side of Independent Play, we have **Structured Play**, of which there are two categories:

Monitored Play

and

Organized Activities

Monitored Play simply involves kids playing under the watchful eye of a parent or other adult, such as a teacher or recess monitor. Now, in cases such as school recess, this is absolutely necessary and prudent. So I don't advocate unsupervised play in situations where there should be supervision. However, granting children a bit of freedom, with a monitor or supervisor nearby but out of earshot, and still maintaining vigilant observation, can instill a sense of independence in their play.

Organized Activities include school sports, band, clubs, as well as

community groups like Scouts, 4H and more. Again, these are not bad things, and they actually build a very different and complementary set of character traits, such as teamwork, camaraderie, learning to follow instructions, and being a part of something bigger than oneself. These activities are great for kids – but in limited doses, unlike today’s culture that tries to fill as much of a child’s day as possible with organized activities.

Even the school environment is so molded to this process of structure, that a teacher or recess monitor will often unknowingly structure the recess game by setting up the rules, helping pick the teams, and controlling most aspects of the game. This blocks the kids from building their own game, in their own way, with creative thought and an independence of rule-making (like the recess games from my childhood: Trashball, Smashball, Buttball and Tire Roll).

We do kids a disservice by scheduling them too much.

So we covered how independent play builds character traits that structured activities may not develop as effectively. And there are many different ways to describe this through various terminologies that psychologists use. So I’ll focus on one, which is a character trait called **Locus of Control**.

Locus of control is a dimension that goes from high *internal* locus of control, meaning that you have the sense of "I’m in control of my own life, I can solve my own problems, I am the master of my destiny" to high *external* locus of control, meaning that you feel as though "I have little control over what happens to me or how things play out in my life, I’m a victim of circumstance, I’m controlled by other more powerful people, I have bad luck."

And most of us are somewhere in the middle on this, but to be healthy, we should lean more to the side of *internal* locus of control, where we believe that we can control our own life.

Now, people with a high *internal* locus of control are far less likely

to suffer from anxiety or depression. And this has been shown for people of all ages – not just children, but adults as well. And that makes sense because, if you believe that you can solve problems that arise, and you believe that you can control your own destiny, then the world is a less scary place. That’s a simplification, but you get it.

By engaging in independent activities – by solving problems – you also develop this *internal* sense that you can solve problems and that you can control your fate, not fully, but at least to a large degree. And that helps you deal with the unknowns in life as they occur.

So it’s not surprising that a high internal locus of control is a healthy characteristic to have, but to develop this high internal level, you have to have practice in exerting control. And the best way for kids to practice exerting control at a young age is through independent play – or by just being in an environment where they feel independent.

And that is exactly what we have been depriving kids of for decades.

Between about 1960 and today, the same period of time in which anxiety and depression has been continuously rising in young people, research studies have shown that internal locus of control among young people has been continuously declining, while there is ever more external locus.

Let’s recap: Independent, non-structured play creates a greater internal locus of control, which lowers rates of anxiety and depression. That seems like a big win. So why are kids engaging in so much less independent play now than they did in the past? And what are the barriers to parents in allowing more of this kind of independent activity?

Well, there have been a lot of changes that have occurred over the decades since 1960, but there are two really big ones.

The first is an increased fear that we have as parents. It’s an increased belief that it is dangerous for our kids to be out of our sight, or for them to be on their own in any sort of way. We now have this general belief that it’s dangerous for kids – or that we are negligent parents – if we’re not constantly watching and supervising them.

And this is an irrational belief, because kids don't get hurt any more today than they ever did in the past. Even with recent increases in crime rates within urban areas, the dangers that parents are afraid of today are no more present in 99% of our country than they ever were. What parents fear most about letting their kids out to play, is that they might be kidnapped, or molested, or even murdered by a stranger on the street. And these crimes against kids almost never happen. They rarely ever happened in the past and they rarely ever happen today. But when they do happen, the media sensationalizes it, leading parents to believe that it is a much more common type of crime than it actually is, and statistics back this up. [1]

Agreed, we live in an entirely different time with more concerns and in some ways more dangers, but for the first time in history, we have a generation of kids who aren't outside and aren't moving their bodies. Unstructured play, rolling around in the grass, or playing in the dirt are identified as being crucial to human health and development.

The other change that has occurred is the "schooling mentality" of child development. School itself has become ever more important and notable in children's lives. As a result, school has become ever more stressful for them, with ever more time spent at school, and on school.

In addition, this schooling mentality has led to the belief that children grow best when they're carefully guided, taught and mentored by adults, and that children's own activities – independent of adults – are a waste of time.

This belief has become ingrained in our culture, also influencing the way parents think. Increasingly, parents subscribe to the notion that their role entails educating, guiding, and facilitating their children's academic success. Consequently, there's a growing emphasis on steering children towards structured (adult-directed) activities, even outside of school hours.

Organized sports have largely replaced the old way that kids used to play – going out to the vacant lot and organizing their own game

together. Children are no longer learning how to create their own activities, to direct their own games, to negotiate with other kids about rules and strategy, and how to solve disputes.

They're not learning the same skills through these organized activities that they would be learning on their own. So in a sense, good intentions have led to this change. We want to protect our children, and we believe that the way to protect them is to watch them all the time, and to not let them near possible danger.

As parents, we also want our children to do well in the world, and we've come to believe that they *will* do well in the world if they are guided and taught by adults. To a great extent, yes – they *do* need guidance and mentoring by adults, and understandably, they do require a certain amount of monitoring and protection.

But what we have forgotten in all of this is that kids also need to learn how to actually play and be outdoors, and not just playing games that have a scoreboard. And they need lots of opportunity to behave independently, to figure out what they themselves want to do, to pursue those activities, and to learn how to solve the problems that arise – on their own.

ACTIONS:

Give your kids things they can own and control

Let them play

Limit the screens

Don't fear their boredom – that's where creativity is born

Fight the urge micro-manage them

Let them fail

Teach them to wonder and ask questions

Give them hours on a summer day to hunt insects, look at clouds, and roll in the grass

[1] While crime rates in the USA have been increasing, kidnappings have been decreasing. Of all kidnappings in the USA each year, 99.8% are by relatives, while only 0.2% are by strangers – the ones you hear about on the crime shows.

Even human traffickers statistically do not abduct victims (children or adults) randomly. Traffickers build relationships with vulnerable targets over time.

In fact, for your child to be kidnapped by a stranger in the USA, you would have to keep them outside, unattended, for 750,000 years for this to be statistically likely to occur.

CHAPTER 3

The Soul is more
Important than
the Body

"Dad, you let me do stuff that most of my friends don't get to do!" my teenage son told me one day.

"Uh oh" I thought. Because I've always considered myself to be a fairly strict parent compared to some other dads, and yet here my son was, basically saying that I'm... *a pushover???*

Well, it turns out that you have to define the category.

Because on that day, my 15 year old son was very happy that I was now letting him rip his dirt bike around on the back roads, as well as letting him do some other things that most parents would say, "over my dead body" about, like jumping off the bridge pilings into the river down at the swimming hole.

On the other hand, when it comes to the moral issues, we're pretty strict. We have to pull back and say a firm "no" to many of the things that our kids want to do, because we believe that the soul is more important than the body. "A fate worse than death" and all that. And our kids also know this and they respect it, generally speaking.

So while we'll let our high school kids jump off the bridge pilings into the river with friends, we won't let them hang out down at the very same river in the evening unsupervised with their guy/girl friends. That's asking for trouble.

So we fell into this parenting concept a bit by accident, and I didn't fully realize it until that day. One day shortly after that, my brother said to me, "It's really hard to say no to my son – he just wants to do so much stuff, and then he gets mad when I say no" (he has less parenting years under his belt than I do).

I answered, "Well, then just... don't say 'no' so much. And you do that by saying 'yes' to other things. Like, maybe start letting him do more physically dangerous things, and it'll scratch that itch."

He was a bit shocked, so I explained to him that these so-called "dangerous" things are essentially the same activities that children have been engaging in up until about 20 years ago, and are within the bounds of common sense, even if they are a bit risky. It's a balance of the risk/reward ratio. And I explained how, when you suddenly start

letting your kid do these slightly more physically dangerous things, you've shown that they have your trust, and that you view them as being a responsible person.

So as you tighten up moral safety, you have to compensate by giving some leeway in physical safety.

That way, your kids feel as though they still get to do cool things – even things that other kids can't do. In fact, you can even purposely allow your child a few privileges that some of their friends might not be allowed to do.

We parent from a traditionally conservative viewpoint, and that naturally translates to a greater focus on moral safety, while we notice that liberal parents focus more on bodily safety of their children. Our culture has undertaken a huge shift over the last 20 years into the camp of bodily, physical safety, kicking any type of moral safety to the curb. Hence we see an big emphasis on safe driving while teen sex is approved and even encouraged.

It represents a total reversal of traditional child-rearing practices, and I am of the opinion that this shift away from moral considerations is a deliberate and targeted assault on the structure of the family.

We are inundated with constant messages portraying having a child as a burdensome responsibility, warning us of the disruptions it will bring to our lives. Then when we do have a child, we're consumed with anxiety about their safety, because that's the narrative that is constantly reinforced.

Even between two parents you can often see the difference between safety and morality. When I was in high school and I would head out with friends, my Mom (the saint) would say, "Rosary in your pocket? No rock music in the car." And my Dad (the cop) would say, "Who's driving? No drinking. The roads are getting slick, drive slow." It's not necessarily that one parent was more liberal than the other, but that they each focused more heavily on one type of safety. This is common in all 2-parent families, and like many other areas of parenting, this is beneficial, because it not only covers all of the bases, but offers a system of checks and balances. Then, when one

parent acts more leniently, and backs down occasionally from their self-appointed zone of strictness, it's a welcome relief to the child.

In an upcoming chapter, we will explore the benefits of surrounding your children with friends and families who share similar parenting approaches, fostering alignment among all parties. However, as previously mentioned, I acknowledged in this chapter that you may intentionally permit your child to engage in activities that their friends might not be permitted to do.

From the moral standpoint, it's crucial to align your moral beliefs with the families and friends that your children associate with, as immoral companions can negatively influence your child. However, hanging out with friends who engage in adventurous activities like downhill bike racing or bridge jumping doesn't necessarily create a negative influence on your own kids.

Most of the privileges we afford our kids (that other parents may not) are mostly unseen by others. Things like allowing our little kids to ride down to the river in the back of our pickup to go swimming, or putting them on our whitewater raft and hitting the rapids of the Blackfoot River. They know that they – and very few other kids they know – get to do that at that age.

Permitting your child to tear around on a 4-wheeler, leap off rocks into the water, or to enjoy non-risky privileges like owning a dog, or walking a mile to do yard work, can instill a sense of special privilege without causing conflict with other families or friends, unlike moral dilemmas, such as allowing them to attend certain movies or parties. It's these latter situations where peer pressure becomes more pronounced, whereas physical privileges tend to involve far less pressure from peers.

So, the pressing question arises: *Should we simply allow our kids to engage in risky behavior?*

Of course not. You should always operate within the bounds of safety, yet just outside of your comfort zone. And there's a huge difference.

But you *should* enlist your kids in their own upbringing. We have

to let our children succeed on their own terms, and yes, on occasion, fail on their own terms. "But what if they drive their dirtbike into a ditch," you ask? My answer is this, "It's much better for them to drive into a ditch with an \$8 allowance than with an \$80,000 a year salary or an \$8 million inheritance".

In the last chapter, we saw how the tendency towards risk aversion in child rearing is depriving our children of the self-directed adventures that build resilience and confidence. Okay, got it. We need to be careful not to over-protect our kids in their physically active life, but also not be imprudent with safety.

My 5 year old skis with me, and I always have to be with him. But there's a little trail through the trees at the end of the run where he likes to go, and for the first part of this winter I followed him along it. Then one day I said, "Hey, you go through the trees and I'll meet you when you come out." He was pretty excited. I zipped down to the part where he would come out of the little trail, and there he was, with a HUGE grin on his face. The next time down, I just skied right past the end of the same trail and down to the lift, giving him a bit more to do on his own. I looked up the hill and spotted him as he popped out of the trees. He paused for a moment, looked for me, didn't see me, then skied right down to the lift. I told him that since he didn't see me, his decision was the correct one, and he was even happier still. It taught him independence, while also giving him a little risk and a feeling of "danger".

Now, this method won't always work with all kids, because there are some that just want the moral leniency, and could care less about getting a green light on the physical risks. You might have a son that's a hopeless romantic and just wants to start dating way too early, but has no inclination to engage in a single adrenaline pumping activity.

But you can still make it work. I mentioned giving greater flexibility in privileges such as getting a job, driving, etc. You just have to give in on some of these more "neutral" things, giving them a bit more freedom in any little way that you can find, and it is still incredibly effective.

CHAPTER 4

The Town with
the Big Dome

"...and the whole town will have a giant dome over it that blocks cell reception and all wifi signals and stuff," my wife said. She was making this prediction about how there will someday be a town where everyone there lives without the internet. She invents imaginary things that actually later come to fruition. It's eerie.

"That's called the National Forest," I said. I can be a real contrarian sometimes.

"No, you know what I mean. Where there's a whole town. Grocery stores, banks, things like that. And nearby, not off somewhere remote. But no internet. No cell reception."

We laid in bed and reverse engineered this sucker. The whole town. I think there was cereal involved. "So there's this whole dome over it that blocks the signals. But ground wires can still carry phone lines. But only regular voice phone."

"Is it a physical dome?"

"No, more like a magnetic shield of sorts."

"So we'd be like the Amish, but stop at 1985 instead of 1915?"

"Something like that."

"What will we call our town? Offlineburg?"

"No, Disconnectville."

"Ah. Can I be mayor?"

"Yes, honey. Goodnight."

While it was a fun thought experiment, it will probably never happen, and even if it did, the property values would be five times the price of anywhere else, because we can be sure that rich people would clamor to move there. Besides, as the Bible says, we should live in the world, not of the world. Our place isn't to flee technology, but to use it and see it as a gift, regulating it and rationing it as required.

But some days I actually do get to experience a little part of this cool concept. I volunteer as a National Ski Patroller at least 12 days per winter, and on those cold early mornings, I head out on the fresh

snow, making first tracks as I head to the lift that will take sweep me up to the little log hut at the top for the day. There I sit, and write this book, at 6,200 feet in the Bitterroot Mountains, looking across 3 states and 2 countries, with no internet needed for the entirety of the day. We set out regular old chalk board messages for the guests. And there I sit and I wait, using only an analog "brick" radio to be summoned to an injury or a toboggan rescue operation.

I wouldn't trade those days for almost anything, and I wonder how many jobs can still operate that way. Not many, I'd guess.

This is the part where most books would start unloading page after page of statistics showing how bad technology and social media is, or where I would say something like, "Tech is like meth." But if you've made it this far in the book, I'd just be 'preaching to the choir' as they say. So I'll attack this in a slightly different – and hopefully more useful – way.

My 16 year old son can drive better than me (this isn't a sidebar, I'll tie this in, don't worry). And yet, while he is a better driver than me, he has also had more accidents and slides into an icy ditch than I have had in one year.

How can that be? Well, kids have the reflex abilities to actually drive better at 16 than a 40 year old does. And I'm 50. But what they *don't* have is the cognitive development needed to make judgments about when to decelerate at a yellow light or to accurately assess the safety of pulling out into an intersection.

Think of it as: Motor Skills vs Judgment Skills. Or to simplify, skills vs experience. Said one more way, it's tactile vs emotional.

And most importantly, at that age they don't have the regulation for addictive behavior that we do at our age. Teens don't have the ability to recognize an addiction when it's happening, and of course they don't fully understand consequences (as we parents already know all too well).

Adults can self regulate, whereas kids and teens don't have the capacity to do that, for the most part. Examples that might spring to mind are drinking and using technology or social media (see – I tied it in). Sure, adults can also form addictive behaviors with regards to drinking and technology use, but their brains are fully developed and they possess better judgment through longer experience, so their risk for addiction is much lower than it is with teens.

Then are all activities by teens at risk of becoming addictive? No. Certain activities are more brain chemical-centered, especially with regards to dopamine spikes. Our earlier example of jumping off a bridge piling into the river – that activity doesn't create addictive behavior. Sure, it's exciting, and it's a rush, but it's an *active* event, so it pumps adrenaline, not dopamine.

The major activities that spike dopamine in the brain and cause addiction in teens are sex, pornography, drugs, alcohol, social media, and technology in general (including video games, and other internet activities). Most adults have a grasp on these things and can reject or regulate them accordingly before they turn into an addiction.

Among the activities listed above, some are perceived as negative, while others are neutral – merely areas where caution is warranted. Take social media, for instance. It's not inherently negative; in fact, it can be quite beneficial in many ways, especially for business.

Consider a scenario where there's no social media. It wouldn't be detrimental for friends to share photos (physical or digital) of their experiences, trips, or new purchases. It provides a window into others' lives, and when it's from someone you love, it can be truly amazing. It fosters sharing in their happiness and perhaps even their times of sadness. But it shouldn't be constant. And it shouldn't be with people you don't know – or barely even care about. Otherwise it becomes this:

**Instead of kids living their lives,
they're watching others live their lives.**

And if you take one thing away from this chapter it's that statement. When the use of social media is nearly constant, you stop living and

you start watching. Use that phrase. Or paste this one up on the fridge. **"Live your life. Don't watch others live theirs."**

Let's talk gaming.

The behavior of gaming and social media use involves dopamine surges in the brain, and dopamine causes people to feel pleasure. That's why people continue to engage in behaviors that cause dopamine to increase – whether they are healthy behaviors or not.

Because of this, we chose not to ever buy a gaming system for our kids. They'll play them sometimes at friend's houses, but that keeps it enough at arm's length, and like I mentioned earlier, most of our friends parent in a similar way to us, so also don't have video games.

We did buy an old Wii system, where they jump around and swing and bat and bowl and golf. We figured that would be better than first person shooter games, and they are only allowed to play it when it's raining or really cold outside.

We also want them to get used to using computers – navigating the operating system, typing, and more, so they all share two Macs and an iPad, none of which have internet enabled. They use Mom's or Dad's Mac for browsing, shopping, researching and emailing.

I put a few games on their Macs, and here's what's important: Only install games that can't be done on paper, or in real life. For example, a flight simulator. Why have them sit and do paint by numbers on a tablet when they can do it on paper? The games we allow them to play are creative, constructive, or use the mind.

It's very important to note that there is a big difference between a teen who is distant, unmotivated or lethargic due to too much tech use, and actual emotional disturbance or mental illness. You need to recognize the difference, then seek professional help if needed.

So here's what I'll leave you with in this chapter:

Don't let technology replace what is offline. Let technology be there to enhance and add to what is *real* – to add things that you can't do offline, giving them a more robust experience and life, instead of replacing the offline life with the online.

When my wife and I got married, we decided to not buy a TV for the first year of our marriage. We were too poor for a laptop, and of course in 1995, we had no smartphones or streaming services either. It was the way we started our marriage so that we would set the tone from the start where the TV wasn't on and running in the house all day, every day.

ACTIONS:

Limit screen time for computers, gaming and tablets

No phones in bedrooms at night – charge in the kitchen

No phones at the table

No phones when visitors are in the house

All social media notifications set to OFF at all times. When you want to go check social activity, it's on your terms, on your time.

All video games should be creative, constructive, or use the mind

What can be done offline, do offline. Let online only supplement and enhance the offline world.

CHAPTER 5

From Protecting
to Equipping

As your child matures, your parental role evolves from protecting to equipping. This transition is pivotal in their transition from being a dependent child to an interdependent adult. Mishandling it can result in the adult needing continual external guidelines and restrictions. Lingering too long in the protective phase can undermine the child's confidence and decision-making skills, fostering reliance on others for choices. This imbalance may manifest in a weakened resolve and tendencies towards manipulation and deceit.

Okay, that was complex. What are we talking about here? Think of it this way. When your son is 5, you make sure he doesn't run his tricycle out onto the street from the driveway. But when he's 12, he rides his bike on the street without you. You no longer protect him, because you've taught him to wear his helmet, check cross streets, be aware, slow down in traffic areas, and many other things. You've equipped him both *physically* by giving him a helmet and a well-running bike, and *mentally* through the knowledge of how to ride safely. And you have even equipped him by your example, showing him how to assess, evaluate, and make reasoned decisions based on that knowledge.

Another way to think of it is that you're moving from shielding to empowering.

Throughout history, there have been several civilizations and societies where children were equipped to take on responsibilities at an early age due to cultural, economic, or social factors. In ancient Roman society, boys were typically trained in warfare and were considered adults at 15 while girls married at 13. The same was true of Ancient Egypt, Medieval Europe, pre-Columbian and Native American civilizations, where children were often involved in agricultural work and survival skills from a young age.

The Aboriginal walkabout is a traditional practice among some Indigenous Australian cultures, particularly those of the Outback. During the walkabout, a teenage boy will leave his community for several months to a year, to live in the wilderness. The boy is expected to fend for himself to find food, water, and shelter, relying on the knowledge he has gained during the protecting phase. He

may also receive guidance and teachings from elder members of his community who accompany him or meet with him at certain points along the journey. Note that there is still some level of protection here – it isn't fully gone, but it is removed to a large degree.

And that's important – we don't want to simply remove the protection. Think of it as a more gradual transition using milestones, like, "Okay, you're 8 now, you can bike out in the street." This gradual transition allows the child to develop independence, resilience, and decision-making skills while you are still providing appropriate support and guidance.

A friend once shared with me the ultimate approach to parenting:

Step One: Kick them out the door and leave them alone.

Step Two: Repeat the next day.

Although it's entertaining, it actually holds a grain of truth. Nonetheless, here are some actionable steps to genuinely aid this transition:

Educate on safety: Equip children with knowledge about safety measures to prevent accidents and potential harm. This includes road safety, fire safety, water safety, stranger danger, and other essential precautions.

Encourage independence: Provide opportunities for your child to take on age-appropriate responsibilities and make safety decisions for themselves. Start with small things and gradually increase their level of autonomy as they demonstrate readiness.

Build milestones: Plan small steps towards more independence for your child, as they transition from your rules of safety to their own. Recognize their efforts and accomplishments as they reach each milestone, developing the skills and confidence to navigate the world on their own.

Promote problem-solving: Instead of immediately intervening to create a safer environment, point out the situation and encourage them to think critically and come up with protections on their own. Offer guidance and support as needed, but allow them to take the lead in finding resolutions.

Foster self-confidence: Remember, equipping is similar to empowering, and that happens with self-confidence. Praise your child's efforts and accomplishments, and focus on their strengths rather than dwelling on mistakes or failures. Help them build self-esteem by acknowledging their abilities and encouraging them to pursue their interests and passions.

Allow small accidents: Offer advice and insights based on your own experiences, but allow your child to have small accidents; to trip, to fall, to get scraped up, then to explore their own paths to protection and learn from their own mistakes. Be a parent who listens actively, offers encouragement, and provides constructive feedback.

But also... **Set boundaries:** Allow small accidents, but establish clear boundaries and reasonable expectations for the bigger things – the real deal breakers. Communicate them to your child clearly and consistently. Help them understand the consequences of their choices if they break these bigger safety rules. Remember, you're still protecting to some extent, even into the equipping phase.

Communicate: Create a supportive environment where your child feels comfortable talking about their concerns. Listen attentively to what they have to say, and offer advice if needed.

Lead by example: Model the behavior and risk-analysis habits for your child to emulate, such as judgment, resilience, problem-solving.

By following these practical steps, then adapting your parenting approach to meet your child's growing needs and capabilities, you can gradually transition from protecting to equipping, supporting their growth and development into capable, resilient, and self-reliant adults.

CHAPTER 6

Wilderness Therapy

In the previous chapter, we explored how a person goes from being a dependent child to an interdependent adult. It's crucial to note that *inter*dependence is not the same as *in*dependence. A mature, well-adjusted adult engages in interdependent relationships within their family and community, offering assistance to others while also accepting help when needed.

So as we saw, your role as a *parent* evolves from a stance of protecting to equipping your child. Meanwhile, *your child* progresses through a series of developmental phases, transitioning from general dependence to interdependence. Specifically, they will progress through the five developmental phases that humans experience:

Caution

Duty

Justice

Trust

Love

And in each of these phases, you can ask your child this question:

"When you do the right thing, why do you do it?"

Since each phase represents a different kind of motivation, each one will have a different answer.

The first two phases, Caution and Duty, begin with external motivation. For you as parent, this is where the "protecting" occurs.

So the answer to the question, *"When you do the right thing, why do you do it?"*

Caution: *Because I'll get in trouble (or get hurt) if I don't.*

Duty: *Because I was told to do it this way.*

The third phase, Justice, stems from internal motivation. For you as a parent, this signals the beginning stages of "equipping".

The answer to the same question, *"When you do the right thing, why do you do it?"*

Justice: *Because it's the right thing for me to do.*

The fourth and fifth phases, Trust and Love, require a deeper

sense of internal motivation. These phases move your child toward interdependence and healthy relationships with others. For you as a parent, you are now fully in "equipping".

Again, the answer to our ongoing question, "*When you do the right thing, why do you do it?*"

Trust: "*Because my parents trust me to do it the right way.*"

Love: "*Because I want to please the people I love, and please God.*"

Let's look at each of these phases a little deeper.

Caution

Fear can be a motivator for good. While it may seem unconventional, a balanced sense of caution acts as a protective shield. The initial phase, Caution, revolves around decision-making rooted in the fear of adverse outcomes: I'll get hurt, I'll get in trouble, I'll get arrested. It stands as the fundamental motivator in an individual's journey.

Caution represents the dependent phase, as your child will rely on others for motivation. As your child learns to recognize and examine their own internal motivations, they progress through subsequent phases, acquiring the necessary skills for sound life choices.

With growth, kids come to recognize life's inherent risks and the importance of self-preservation. As they progress beyond this phase, they realize that caution, while essential, represents merely the most rudimentary form of motivation.

Duty

The number one way children develop a strong sense of duty is by doing daily chores and taking part in responsibilities related to caring for animals or younger siblings. The Duty phase represents the first move from dependence to interdependence. Duty is basic.

Note that a child can make a good choice out of a sense of duty,

while at the same time have a bad attitude. The answer to the question in the Duty phase: "Because I was told to do it this way" is a motivator to do the right thing, to be safe, to not make that poor decision... But it's not a perfect motivator. Not yet.

Justice

This is really a sense of what is right and wrong. Duty can only take one so far, as historically, we know that dictators and killers have committed horrible things in the name of "duty". As your child grasps the concept of duty, you can gradually introduce the notion of justice to them.

Trust

During this phase, you will entrust your child with greater responsibilities, and more confidence is placed in them. They will begin to value the freedoms and privileges they now enjoy, seeking opportunities to earn and demonstrate your trust through their actions.

Love

The Love phase represents a sort of culmination of all of the preceding phases combined. It goes beyond mere behavior, aspiring toward spirituality, personal growth and excellence. The goal of this phase is for your child to become their best self. When individuals reach this peak, they operate from a place of innate goodness, not requiring any sort of internal compass to do what's right. Their actions align effortlessly with their values, because that's who they are deep inside.

Love, however, is a motivation that isn't always present in everything we do. As human beings, we still rely heavily on the other phases – and that's acceptable. But the ultimate motivation is love. When your child learns how to maintain healthy relationships – with themselves, with you as parents, and with those around them, they truly become better people, wanting to be genuinely good and true.

They want a life of meaning and interconnection. They are neither dependent, nor independent – they are interdependent, working with others and building deep relationships with others, and with God. They learn that those relationships become the most fulfilling journeys in life.

Wilderness therapy programs typically guide troubled teens along a similar journey from general dependence to interdependence, following these same five phases. However, troubled teens, particularly those from broken homes, often remain stuck in the initial phase – Caution. They avoid wrongdoing primarily out of fear of punishment, or worse – even disregarding the consequences of punishment altogether.

Years ago, a coworker of mine told me that the cops were at her house last night because of the kids. "What happened???" I asked. "I caught one of them with weed in their room, and he didn't care that I found it, so I called the cops." That's an example of someone who is barely even in the Caution phase. That made me so sad. Your job as a parent is to discipline. It falls on a teacher's shoulders only in your absence, and should hopefully *never* be the police's job.

In addition to moving your child through these five phases, there are other aspects of these wilderness programs that are worth considering – and even integrating – into your family life, even if only in minor ways. It doesn't necessitate embarking on mountain climbs or roughing it outdoors. In fact, it doesn't need to involve outdoor activities at all. You can introduce more nature, science, and cognitive exercises at home, as well as engage in hands-on activities that stimulate critical thinking – anything that fosters intellectual growth, rather than dulls it.

Place day trips and family outings in nature at a high priority in your family. Make these days fun. Bring friends, and be "that family" that does epic day trips and adventures. We're known as that family, and when we go, we bring candy and snacks, play follow the leader

on the hiking trail and do the absolute most goofy things with our kids that we can possibly dream up. Our kids know that hiking days are when Mom and Dad are at their best. We're happy, we hold hands, we laugh, and we listen to the kids' stories as we walk. While many children typically hate hikes, our kids thoroughly enjoy them. I truly believe this is why.

Even our kids in their 20's still want to go on hikes with the family, or jump on the boat for a day on the lake (as I write this, our kids are aged 27 down to 6).

It's the same with campfires. Virtually every family is able to build at least a small campfire pit in their backyard. A real one – in the ground, with actual *rocks* around it. Ours sits under 80 foot Ponderosa pines with a view out over the valley floor below. We'll invite a family over and ask the kids to tell us all stories. The adults just sit and listen to the kids say the funniest things, and we laugh. The kids view the campfire as a sort of stage for their antics, and they are some of the best memories for all of us.



"Wilderness therapy" is more important now than ever before. Teen wilderness programs are experiencing a significant surge in applications, attributed to teens suffering from tech addiction. Parents are handing iPhones to their kids at increasingly younger ages, before their brains have fully developed. This means that they are much more likely to become tech addicted.

Now, I considered covering this next part much earlier in the book. In fact, I was planning on opening with it in the first chapter - BAM! Let's scare you, the parent, right off the bat. But I decided to soft-sell this a bit and hide it in a chapter called "Wilderness Therapy", because if you've made it this far in the book, you get it. You REALLY get it, and I'm really proud that you're here, doing the work for your kids.

So bear with me, and let's see how damaging this tech is, because there may be a few things in the rest of this chapter that you haven't considered.

Technology, like gambling, is understood as a risk for **process addiction**, which is a type of addiction where certain behaviors are rewarded with pleasure. It's where people become fixated on returning for that reward in a way that disrupts daily life. This happens with adults. But now think – kids... or teens. Bad news.

Technological dependence has been undeniably linked to mental health issues. In a study published by NeuroRegulation, researchers at the University of San Francisco surveyed 135 students about their smartphone use and its effect on their mental state. The researchers reported that screen time was linked to increased loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Another study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, surveyed 15 and 16 year-olds and found a significant association between frequent social media use, and symptoms of ADHD.

The World Health Organization now includes "gaming disorder" as a mental health condition in the 11th edition of International Classification of Diseases. For an individual diagnosed with a gaming disorder, gaming takes precedence over other daily activities, negatively affecting important aspects of life – social, personal, family, educational, and occupational – for a period of at least 12 months. While the current definition includes only gaming, many clinical social workers speculate that it will eventually be expanded to include other types of tech addiction, such as social media use. Meanwhile, experts are looking into treatments for this modern addiction and its effects.

Aha! That's where nature – and wilderness – comes in.

The benefits of spending time outside are widely reported. In a study called "30 Days Wild", conducted by the University of Derby and the Wildlife Trusts, researchers asked 12,400 participants to engage with nature every day for a month. The results showed that simply spending time in nature has positive impacts on physical

health, such as reduced hypertension, respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses, as well as improved mood and reduced anxiety.

In Japan, "forest bathing" is increasingly popular. I suppose the Japanese can call it a bath, but here in America we would call it "sitting quietly in nature". Some doctors are even writing prescriptions for "time in nature", and I can bet that the big pharma companies are running to their marketing departments trying to find ways to negatively spin that free "prescription".

Here's an interesting one. Low levels of physical activity and a lack of time spent outdoors raises levels of (bad) cortisol, the body's main stress hormone. Cortisol accumulates during periods of anxiety, stress, and inactivity, with technology causing significant spikes in the levels of this harmful hormone.

As technology usage increases, cortisol levels rise, which is inevitable given the stressful nature of modern jobs, most of which rely on technology. While adults can successfully manage this cortisol buildup within their busy tech-infused lives, the absence of any outlets for burning it off can intensify anxiety to dangerous levels. Engaging in even minor and occasional outdoor activities, as well as staying even moderately active burns off cortisol and can counteract the negative effects gained from routine screen use in a daily job.

Much like someone who wants to cut back on alcohol use might look to the successful model of the Alcoholics Anonymous program, we also can build a basic plan by borrowing from the model of many successful wilderness programs.

Wilderness therapy programs regulate process addiction while also tackling the compounding side effects of increased cortisol levels by:

- 1.) Removing the temptation of technology
- 2.) Increasing activity and movement, and
- 3.) Introducing the healing element of nature

These three things are exactly what we learned earlier in this chapter, when we discussed taking day trips in nature. In our experience, it works, because it hits all three of these things at once. Did my wife and I know this when we were young parents with our three little kids back in our 20's? Nope. We just liked to hike and swim and scramble over rocks with our kids. And I'm darn glad we did. Only recently have I realized that what we did was so beneficial, starting all those years ago.

Build a Wilderness Therapy Plan for your family

How you structure this plan is really up to you, but it must involve removing – or limiting – technology to some degree, based on times of the day, ages of the kids, situations, or any combination. For example, we require that any of our kids who are not yet graduated leave their phone downstairs on my desk at night while they are upstairs in bed. We also have a "no phones in the bathroom" rule, and of course a "no phones at the dinner table" rule. As another example, you might decide to restrict a child's access to a phone while at home, but permit them to carry it for safety when they venture outside.

Your plan will require careful consideration, planning, and continual adjustment to adapt to evolving family dynamics and needs.

Part 2 of your plan is to actually get out into the wilderness – or at least some form of nature – often. Everyone lives near the outdoors! Here are the benefits you can expect to see from both a reduction in technology, as well as an increase in exposure to nature:

Therapeutic Environment

Being surrounded by nature can promote relaxation, reduce anxiety, and enhance overall well-being, as well as remove your kids from the distractions and stressors of daily life.

Reflection and Awareness

Spending time in the wilderness allows kids to disconnect from

external influences, enabling them to focus on the people they are physically with (or to focus on their own thoughts if alone). This increases self-reflection, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of their emotions, behaviors, and challenges.

Personal Growth and Development

Wilderness activities encourage personal growth and development by challenging individuals to step out of their comfort zones, overcome obstacles, and develop resilience. Activities such as hiking, camping, and outdoor adventure sports promote teamwork, problem-solving skills, and self-confidence.

Emotional Regulation

Engaging in outdoor activities and wilderness experiences can help kids learn to manage their emotions effectively. The serene environment of the wilderness provides opportunities for deep thought and relaxation, leading to improved emotional regulation and coping skills.

Social Skills and Relationships

Time spent outdoors often involves family or group activities and interactions, fostering the development of social skills, communication abilities, and healthy relationships. Camping, hiking, backpacking, rafting or navigating through the wilderness, encourage teamwork and cooperation among family members or friends.

Physical Health and Wellness

Outdoor activities promote physical fitness, healthy habits, and an active lifestyle. Hiking, backpacking, skiing, biking and other wilderness activities provide opportunities for exercise, fresh air, and exposure to natural sunlight, which can contribute to improved physical health and overall well-being.

Connection to Nature

The wilderness helps kids develop a deeper connection to nature, fostering appreciation, respect, and stewardship of the land. Spending time outdoors can instill a sense of wonder and curiosity.

So those are the benefits of making "wilderness therapy" an integral part of your family life. Again, this doesn't mean you have to start doing epic climbs, 4 day backpacking trips, or adrenaline-fueled adventures starting right now, but it does mean that you should get out and take a hike once or twice a month. Research a wilderness area near you, a waterfall, or a natural point of interest. Hike to a secluded swimming hole when it's hot for an amazing reward at the end. Before you go, talk about it with your kids, plan the food you'll take, set them each up with a backpack and a water bottle (they love that when they're young), and just make it a great adventure.

Overall, wilderness therapy offers a well-rounded approach to supporting children and teens in their personal growth, emotional well-being, and social development, providing them with valuable skills and experiences that will positively impact their lives.

And you're the person that will make this happen for them.

YOUR WILDERNESS THERAPY PLAN

Remove the temptation of technology

Increase activity and movement, and

Introduce the healing element of nature or wilderness

Create a culture of adventure, not laziness, and they will automatically want to be doing active and adventurous things more, and on tech less.

CHAPTER 7

Keeping up with
the Jones Kid

At this point in the book, you're thinking, "Okay, got it. These are valid points and I'm on board, but I just can't expect my kid to change. He's been raised a certain way."

And true. I get it. It is really hard to make disciplinary, moral or other structural changes in the middle of childhood. Ask any parent that has started attending church again, or cleaned up their life or just moved their family onto a better path – it's usually met with push back from kids, especially teens. **Because their previous life was perceived to be a better life.**

Obviously, it's easiest to make changes when they're young, but it's not impossible to start when a child is in their teenage years.

There are three strategies to start this change:

The first strategy is a secret that works: **You show them how this change, or this new life is better.** *And that starts with you.* You and your spouse. I know, it's hard – it's hard for us too, and it never gets much easier. Just be involved and set the example first, before you even implement a single change in the household beyond yourself. Because if you want this bad enough, you'll have to change a lot of habits yourself.

And that means not sitting every evening and watching TV shows. Enjoy a football game on Sunday, or a movie night here and there, but don't have the TV running all day. Turn it off. Just that alone will get you 10% of the way to where you need to be, even if you ignore everything else in this book.

Show your kids that you're not looking at your phone every time it dings. Shut off notifications 100% for a while. Show them that you're sick of playing video games or doom scrolling YouTube. Make it clear (verbally and by example) that you've picked up a new hobby like playing guitar or working outside in the garden. They might think you're weird, but there's a small part inside them that will respect this choice and know that it's best for you.

And sure, all of this can really stink at beginning, but then the magic happens, and what comes next is amazing: Your kids will start to notice a real change in you, and they'll wonder why you're

happier, more present, and have more time to spend with them. And it's not because you're faking it, but because it's real. It's the real you. Because doing the things I just mentioned will give you more energy and put you in a better mood – just by default.

And when they see this improvement in you, if they have even a small level of respect for you, they'll get on board and start making changes themselves – and that's where you help them along and guide them and tell them "we're all improving together."

Now I made that sound simplistic, and of course it's not. Every family will have their own unique challenges and bumps along the way, and making these changes can be a real grind at first. But it gets better, I promise you. In fact, soon you'll look back and wonder what the heck you were doing living the way you did, similar to the sensation you get after tidying up clutter at home and wondering why you tolerated the disarray for so long!

Quick note: NEVER say to your kids (or even to yourself), "We're going to try out this change for a bit and see how it works." That's setting them up for failure, and actually admitting defeat before you even start! In marriage, it's "Til death do we part", not "Let's test drive this marriage thing and see how we like it." Same applies here.

We covered how to affect change starting with *you*. The next part gets a bit more complicated, because it **involves an external pressure – who your kids hang out with**. You've heard it said that you are the sum total of your five closest friends? For the most part, that's true, and of course we know that this influence effect is even more compounded with kids and teens. Even one influential friend can change your kid temporarily or permanently, for better or worse.

Now, we're blessed that we were able to enroll our kids in a private school for years, although we now homeschool them. So virtually all of the families that our kids are around are "on the same page" as us, because attend the same school, as well as the same church as us, for the most part.

This particular private school requires all students' phones to be checked in to the office in the morning and checked out at the end

of the day. In addition, most of the parents forbid smart phones for their kids until they are graduated, as well as limit social media and internet use (even filtered internet). In other words, they all choose to raise their kids in this more traditional minded way that I am outlining here in this book, although the range of what is allowed can still vary quite a bit from one family to the next. But generally speaking, we can be assured that if our child is over at a friend's house, they will be 90% on board with what we believe and most certainly will not allow our kids access to technology.

It's almost as if we have this built-in support group.

During our camping trips with other families, we collectively establish rules for the teenagers beforehand, ensuring that everyone is aligned. Within these agreed-upon boundaries, the kids still enjoy themselves, and when they're all united in the same understanding, they tend to make the best of it, and accept the rules more willingly. It's similar to the camaraderie forged in military boot camp, where facing challenges together fosters cooperation and adherence to guidelines.

So we have been very lucky, needless to say. Or "blessed" as my wife would say. I always get that one wrong.



Now you've heard the term "Keeping up with the Joneses", meaning that you're always trying to match those successful Jones people next door – they have soooo much cool stuff, and they're always going on great trips... why can't *we* have all that stuff?

So the more you can eliminate the "keeping up with the Jones kid" mentality from your own kid's attitude, the better. And you can do this by working to adjust the mindset of your child and having them understand that.... Okay, I'll stop right there. That part is virtually impossible. Sure, it can happen, but let's be honest – it's rare.

The solution is really more physical, more logistical. You have to remove the threat, and this becomes really difficult if they're at a

school where a majority of the kids around them are living in a digital zombie world. They are surrounded and inundated by it every day.

So you can try to pick and choose who they hang out with, but as we know, that's also incredibly hard, because oftentimes the more you push back on one of their friends, the more they will want to hang out with them. Keep in mind that every child is unique, meaning some may gravitate towards the wrong influences, while others might possess a stronger sense of determination. Tailor your approach to each child individually.

The best way to "steer" them is to encourage them to get involved in activities that are made up of kids who share interests in the outdoors, creativity or thought. As a coach at our private high school for years, I couldn't believe what good kids I met on the other cross country teams. Solid kids that gave me a real hope for the future of our country. Those are the ones I would want my kids to be around.

Some of the best and brightest kids come out of sports teams and clubs. Even when my kids are out on the ski hill, they meet new friends who are always nice, solid kids because they're out breathing the mountain air and being active.

So while you can't control who they play with at recess, or sit next to in Algebra, you *can* steer them towards – and even control – the hobbies and extracurricular activities that they join.

And you can also choose the families that your own family associates with, or invites over to your house. It's not hard to make an agreement with a family that, when you're together, you put the digital things away during that time. That's not out of line, and in fact, most other parents welcome and respect that.

Finally, I would highly suggest joining a good, conservative, traditional-minded church, and slowly start steering family friendships in that direction. I meet many people who say they are "spiritual, but not religious". They love God and accept Jesus and they're good people, but they view religion as a set of absolute laws. But in a way, you can also view religion as a community of people with a similar belief system. If attending church services and

functions bring people together for the same purpose, then isn't that precisely what you're aiming for – to guide your family away from toxicity and towards good? The belief system extends far beyond the church building on Sundays.

I previously outlined three strategies for initiating change with your kids, and we've addressed the first two: 1.) It starts with you, and 2.) surround yourself with a "support group" of like-minded families. The final one is more of a communication strategy:

Don't blindside your kids with this new change. Explain why, and how, it will improve them. Get THEM to want it.

Teens need to understand *why* you are telling them to do something. My mom's advice to me as a young parent was, "Don't rationalize with a 2-year old." True. But teens? They need to understand what you are telling them to do.

Rather than simply enforcing rules and outright forbidding them from having a phone, you might allow them to have one, but establish clear and firm guidelines. Then, explain the rationale behind these rules. Avoid vague explanations like "it's for your own good." Instead, provide tangible examples of the detrimental effects of excessive digital use. Offer concrete instances of how social media can harm relationships. Additionally, explain to them the advantages of limiting their digital exposure – that they'll be ahead of their peers as adults, potentially earning more money and achieving greater success.

Basically – Show your kids that you value who they are as people.

Remember, if you want to start the change, it ultimately starts with you. Surround your family with good people, create a culture of traditional values in your home, but make it fun, make it happy, and make every day a joy for your kids. Then you'll witness them wholeheartedly embrace these principles, fostering stronger family bonds and a more resilient marriage for you and your spouse.

CHAPTER 8

Kids Don't Need
as Much as
You Think

It was Halloween night, and I was feeling guilty. I was all emotionally beat to heck, because kids were out there trick-or-treating, and our kids weren't. We had done the trick or treating thing with our first two kids when they were pretty young, but then we had second thoughts on the issue, and like many parents these days, we decided against it, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this book.

Our kids were still young, so they weren't really catching on, and we had moved to a house in the country where no kids rang the doorbell on that night anyway. And yet, I was sitting there, feeling bad. Suffering some FOMO on behalf of my kids.

And then I realized it:

1.) My kids don't need to do everything I did growing up, and

2.) My kids don't need to do everything other kids do.

There are things that I got to do growing up that my kids don't get to do, like going to Disney World and eating at fancy restaurants and being able to sign up for virtually any music lesson or sport I wanted to. But I never had a dog, a 4-wheeler, a motorbike, went camping, jumped in the river, lived in the mountains, or even had any cousins my age.

But my kids *do* have *all* of those things. Things I never got.

So when they don't get to go trick-or-treating, but instead, get to enjoy a "Saints" party with costumes and tons of candy the next afternoon at church? Or smash a huge candy-filled piñata instead of trick or treating like another family we know does? Well, that's fine. And they don't even notice what they missed. Because children are so incredibly adaptable. Happy kids can be found in the poorest parts of the world because of this very reason.

But that nagging guilt creeps in all the time and I have to catch it and squash it. I feel sorry for my kids when they have to go to bed, when all they got to do all day was to eat, go to school, do their jobs, run around outside, play with legos, run around the house, read, then go to bed. Poor them, I think. But they're okay with it. Because it's really all they need, and they love it.

But parents cave all the time. With our first kids, I would let my kids talk me into anything – I was a pushover, believing that their desires were necessities. At first allowing them to play video games, I later regretted the negative impact on their attitudes. Showering them with gifts, I disliked the manipulative traits I inadvertently fostered in them.

I quickly realized this:

Don't ever allow your kids to engage in behaviors that will cause you to dislike or disapprove of them. Like, I'm going to give you X, but I'm going to hate the result it creates. That's crazy.

Kids need very little stimuli – Much less than we think they do. We tend to think that kids need the same things that we ourselves need for pleasure, but they don't.

Let's get into a little science here. There's dopamine in the brain, or "pleasure receptors". And the amount that we need as adults is more than what kids need. The more dopamine a kid gets, the more they want. While this is also true for adults, it is much less so, because we adults know how to better manage it. Imagine getting your dream car at 16, vs. getting it at 60, at which time of life we would be much better able to regulate those pleasure receptors.

And yet we keep handing our kids phones and social media because... well, *we have it, and their friends have it...* and then we all complain how toxic this is.

So we got scientific. Now let's get philosophical.

The problem is not actually pleasures themselves. The problem is that **pleasure experienced without a prior requirement for pursuit is terrible for us.** On the other hand, this is why motivation and hard work create the most healthy pleasures – the harder we work for something, the more beneficial the pleasure is.

We're going to find in the near future, that the most successful people are the ones that can regulate and control their relationship

to pleasures, and can withhold instant gratification and stimuli. Because we have a huge proximity to pleasures now, more than ever before. And we assume because these pleasures are there, that we should have them, and that our kids should too.

Worldwide Oxy use (prescribed) in the US is now over 70%. We're so programmed to constantly get pleasure, and then we're passing this message on to our kids, instead of teaching them basic self-sacrifice, giving of self, and not opening the fridge every time they're hungry.

Addiction is a progressive narrowing of the things that bring you pleasure. You start focusing on fewer things, dialing it down to three, or two, or one thing that you do, but you do it more, and more, and more, ignoring everything else.

A good life is the opposite. It's a larger quantity of smaller things that bring you pleasure, and that's how kids should be living their day.

A day where recess is a huge deal. Where getting a gold sticker on their test is a big thing. It's the many small things throughout the day that bring you pleasure – that's what's healthy. Especially the things that bring you pleasure through motivation and hard work, not pleasure through brainless things like video games.

The key is to self regulate, and then to teach our kids how to self regulate, and that includes regulating the dopamine rushes that come from things like scrolling tiktok. And to not worry so much when you have to remove a privilege from your kid, or to hold them back from friends, or say no to things that other kids may get to do. Again, replace it with something better – feed them the *right* addictions *early!*

ACTIONS

Don't worry about raising happy kids. They'll be happy.
Give them some attention instead
Feed them the right "addictions" early!

CHAPTER 9

Raising Farm Kids
without a Farm

My wife and I always laugh and say that country songs describe our life. When we call our kids in for supper, they tend to be absolutely filthy, exhausted, and completely content.

Now, I'm not holding our kids up as the gold standard, but living on our little mountaintop spot in Idaho really helps to build character in them. They carry themselves with confidence. They find joy in their work (most of the time...) They're creative. They have the ability to solve problems on their own (like strategically stacking logs onto the ATV trailer and pulling them up a half mile trail to the house).

But you don't have to live on a mountain, or on a farm, to love the same kind of life. We know a family that lives in a neighborhood in town, and I swear they're more "farm-ey" than some farm kids. I'm talking about homesteading skills, like making homemade foods, raising small animals, and gardening. And the kids rip around town on their bikes, looking for any random pile of dirt or construction site to just ride around on or play on. They live in town, but they live like farm kids. They can take what they learn by homesteading, playing, and just by living simply, and apply it to school, a future job, or social skills.

These days, parents release their kids from doing chores around the house, and then these kids end up as young adults in the workplace still waiting for a checklist – but it doesn't exist. More importantly, they lack the impulse, even the instinct, to roll up their sleeves and pitch in and look around and wonder, "How can I be useful to my coworkers? How can I anticipate a few steps ahead to what my boss might need?" But farm kids grow up with that attitude built in, and you can easily instill the same in your kids, wherever you live.

Here are some of the life skills that farm kids have, and how to you can build the same in your kids, wherever you live.

Farm Kids have a greater awareness of weather and the environment

Farm kids are in tune with nature every day. They are aware of the weather forecast and prepare properly, having a great respect for the land and what it can give back. Even if you live in town, you can

compost. We teach our kids that food *never* goes in the trash. We have a bucket for the chickens, but even when I'm eating at my desk at work and have an apple core or some bad food from the office fridge, I walk downstairs, out to the parking lot, and toss it into the bushes between the office buildings. Some small rabbit or rodent or even a worm will be very happy. My kids see us take the dead leaves from the house plants and toss them out the back door instead of into the trash. In the fall, we pile up branches in the corners of the yard to build "animal habitats" – winter homes for whatever animals might want to use them. Then, when it snows, we go back and look for tracks going in and out of these little brush piles.

Farm Kids have a good Work Ethic

Chores have to get done on a farm – early in the morning through wind, rain or snow. Create a home life of chores where your kids will never be strangers to working hard for their rewards, whether that's a promotion at a future job or a fruitful harvest in their garden.

Farm Kids are great at Problem-solving

All their lives, farm kids witness what it means to problem-solve. On a farm, things break, and they have to either fix the equipment or find another way to do the task. While this book discusses a *reduction* of technology, and not a *removal* of technology, this is a perfect example of a healthy time to use YouTube. There is a wealth of DIY and "how to" videos online that can teach your kids how to repair small engines or fix absolutely anything. Start fixing your own things at home, and all these fix-it moments will lead to a wealth of mechanical know-how and perseverance.

Farm Kids use Teamwork

When there's a big task to get done on the family farm, everyone pitches in. Even if each person's role is a little different, people don't put up their feet until all jobs are complete. This teamwork mentality translates well for farm kids who enter the workforce. When you create an environment of teamwork and selflessness at home, your kids naturally work harder out at their job and bolster their co-workers. In turn, they'll always be an integral part of the company,

or they'll make great entrepreneurs leading their own teams.

Farm Kids develop Time Management

Nature can place interesting time constraints on farmers when it comes to planting and harvesting. That means there's often little time to waste. While some days of the week or times of the year can be stressful on your home life (like school days) these times can also help instill the importance of time management in your kids. When they're older, they'll skip procrastination and opt for rolling up their sleeves and getting the work done.

Research actually backs this up: Children who plan their own goals, set weekly schedules and evaluate their own work build up their frontal cortex and take more control over their lives.

Farm Kids learn to accept the Things they cannot Control

The weather can throw a big wrench into farming life. But farmers make the most of what they have and soldier on. A poll shows that, on average, Americans are dissatisfied with the current weather one day out of every three days. Why let something that you can't control rule your mood 1/3 of your life? Teach your kids how the weather of each day brings opportunities, even when it's cold and rainy. This role modeling will teach your kids to always do their best, even when life presents obstacles.

Farm Kids know how to enjoy the Simple Things

All the hard work and the long days on the farm make life's little rewards sweeter. These can be as simple as a beautiful sunset on the field's horizon, a slice of pie made with homegrown rhubarb, or a cool dip in the pond on a hot night. At the heart of it, farm life is fun and full of great memories that money can't buy, and you can create this same environment at home. Cultivate a love for the simple things in life and your kids will model your behavior.

Farm Kids know where their Food comes from

To most kids, pork and pig are totally different things, and vegetables are mystery edibles that they are forced to eat. Spending a day on a farm, visiting an orchard, or growing a small vegetable

garden will change the way your kids see food (and also help them waste less).

Farm Kids have Responsibility

Feeding and watering, cleaning and grooming, building and fixing are daily tasks that take place on every farm every day, and farm kids know that if they don't follow through, serious consequences will happen. It's amazing what happens as soon as you give your child a little responsibility. Encourage them to get a pet or start a garden, or volunteer for a cause, but make it seem like their idea and their decision (maybe with a little subtle coaxing from you).

Farm Kids know Safety Skills

Being aware of your surroundings is the number one rule when farming. Milking cows, working on equipment, feeding pigs, catching chickens, and working in the gardens all require safety awareness at all times. As we explored in an earlier chapter, give your kids a little free rein in the realm of safety, so that they learn that *they themselves* are responsible for their own safety, not you or anyone else. This teaches them to keep their guard up at all times and to protect themselves and the loved ones around them.

Farm Kids know that Hard Work results in Sweet Rewards

Farming is one of the hardest jobs. It is physical, mental, stressful, and emotional, but at the end of the day it is so rewarding. Teach your kids to help out around the house – without being asked. Do this by creating an environment at home of "work hard, play hard." It's simple. Instill a sense of hard work, then celebrate when it's finished.



Sure, raising farm kids without living on a farm requires creativity and effort, but it's entirely possible to instill a love for nature, hard work, and the outdoors in your kids.

Here are a few more ideas:

Go camping. I can't stress this enough. Don't like sleeping on the ground or in a tent? Then your kids never will either. Make the best of it and do it!

Encourage outdoor exploration. Spend time outdoors as a family, and encourage your kids to observe plants, animals, and ecosystems, fostering a deeper connection to the natural world. When you visit a park, take a walk and look at nature instead of going right to the swings. In the early spring, we go out and look for "signs of spring" – anything that's sprouting up. I love it, and the kids love it. If you do it too, your kids will have a love of the outdoors for life.

Look for community gardens or urban farms in your area where you can volunteer or rent a plot. Involve your kids in planting, nurturing, and harvesting crops. It's a hands-on way to teach them about gardening and agriculture. Take your kids on field trips to local farms. Many farms offer tours where children can learn about different crops, animals, and farming practices. They may even have the opportunity to interact with animals and participate in farm activities.

If there are 4-H or FFA chapters in your area, consider enrolling your kids (while still allowing them enough time for independent play as mentioned earlier). These organizations offer various programs and activities related to agriculture, leadership, and life skills. Keep an eye out for agricultural fairs, farmers' markets, and other events in your area. They will also occasionally feature agricultural exhibits, demonstrations, and activities that can be educational and enjoyable for kids.

Plant a Garden at Home. Even if you don't have a large yard, you can still plant a small garden in pots or raised beds. Let your kids choose what to plant and involve them in weeding and caring for the garden. It's a great way to teach them responsibility, the life cycle, and the basics of growing food. Use farm-fresh ingredients to cook meals with your kids. Whether it's vegetables from your garden or locally sourced produce, involve them in meal preparation. It helps

them understand the connection between farming and food.

You may be able to raise small animals like chickens, rabbits, or even bees, depending on your living situation and local regulations. This teaches children about animal care, responsibility, and where food comes from.

Having a farm life mentality is just as good as physically living on a farm. By integrating this lifestyle into your family, you can raise a "farm kid" who appreciates nature, understands where their food comes from, and develops a strong work ethic and valuable skills for the rest of their life.

CHAPTER 10

One Kernel at a Time

Back in high school, I had friends who acted like caffeinated squirrels with the car radio. Before a song could even reach the best part, someone would switch stations. The rest of us, squished in the backseat, would erupt into a chorus of protests, begging them to *just* pick a station and *stick* with it. It was like a dysfunctional game of musical chairs, only instead of chairs, it was radio frequencies, and the music wasn't playing. Annoying doesn't even begin to cover it.

So we established some ground rules and invented "Audio Navigator". Whoever occupied the coveted "shotgun" seat became the Audio Navigator, tasked with the responsibility of guiding our musical journey. The golden rule was simple: each song had to be played in its entirety, with only one exception – if you absolutely hated a song, you had a single opportunity to switch stations. You then *had to* listen to the next song to the end without changing it, no matter what. You were locked in.

With a mere press of one of the five preset buttons, fate determined our audio destiny.

I suppose even in those early days, we understood that we would start tiring of music once dissatisfaction set in. The abundance of choices and constant change seemed to dilute the excitement, leaving us less eager for the next song.

Enter the world of Spotify and smartphones, and the joy of waiting for your favorite song to come on the radio is completely crushed. I still play Audio Navigator with my teens when we're on the road, but now with Spotify. We pick a playlist, put it on shuffle, and play the exact same game.

It's the basic concept of simplification, and of practicing the little things. Engaging in both of these things can leave you feeling so much more satisfied.

One morning a few years ago I was listening to the local morning show on one of our country stations, where the hosts always seem to be discussing food. Sure enough, on this morning, the hosts were embroiled in an animated discussion about none other than popcorn – ways to pop it, how to season it, and even how to eat it. One of them

declared, "If you want the best popcorn experience ever, eat just one kernel at a time, and don't put another one in your mouth until you've swallowed the previous one."

I instantly laughed out loud, finding it ridiculous, but as I started thinking about it, I quickly realized the alignment of this with the model of delayed gratification.

That evening during dinner, I shared the idea with the kids, and they were enthusiastic about testing it during our next movie night. A few evenings later we tried it, and they found the experience absolutely amazing, declaring the popcorn to be the best ever. Afterwards, I subtly explained the rationale behind the practice to them, attempting to avoid their ongoing perception that they are somehow my lab rats for parenting theories.

Which leads me to the question: *Should you force this agenda of simplification, delayed gratification, and practicing the little things on your kids?* Absolutely not. Overly strong, unquestioning authority doesn't give "buy-in" to anyone, especially a teen. Such efforts are unlikely to yield results if they're forced.

You do it in two ways:

1.) Modeling – Your kids see you living a life of more simplicity. A life where you're not constantly pulling out your phone when a text comes in (always wait for the 3rd ding anyway – people always send three in a row), or changing the station, or being dissatisfied and impatient with your job, and your food, and showing your boredom with every little thing. Instead, let them see you living in the present and savoring every little bit of life as it unfolds before you.

2.) Make it a game – Play Audio Navigator in the car, eat popcorn one kernel at a time, and find a hundred other things to do to delay gratification, making the present more anticipatory. My kids have told me that they enjoy music more when they listen in our weird little way, and that not only do they see it as a fun game, but they recognize it as a good practice. I don't think I could have achieved that result if I had commanded, or even gently suggested, that they do things this way. Show your kids that you value who they are.

So let's consider how this aligns with the traditional approach to raising children, which is the focus of this book. In the past, people embraced a simpler lifestyle and valued the importance of practicing the little things. Despite facing greater challenges, they found contentment and happiness in these simple pleasures, which were integral parts of their lives.

And kids yearn for this, without even knowing it. Our local school district gave out one of those handheld cup and ball toys to each student one year, and I couldn't believe how many kids were playing with them while waiting for their cross country meet to start. Our boys from the private school I was coaching at walked up and asked one of the kids if he could play with it. My brother and I were standing there laughing because there had actually been an episode of *The Simpsons* about this very thing called "I'm really into this cup and ball now!"

After that came the fidget spinners. Every kid was playing with them. Simplicity is addicting, and we don't readily acknowledge that.

In a world that celebrates instant gratification, old-fashioned parenting emphasizes the importance of patience. Modeling and showing your kids how to wait their turn, to work towards long-term goals, and to understand the value of perseverance contributes to their lifelong development of resilience and a strong work ethic.

Lead your family towards simplification, living in the present moment, and practicing patience and delayed gratification.

ACTIONS

Lead by example – show your family how you value simplification and enjoyment of the little things

Try periodic abstinence or delays of a few things you enjoy. Catholics do this during Lent (before Easter), but you can choose any time.

A good example would be to agree as a family to not post to social media, or connect to technology during certain periods of time.

Last Thought

While modern parenting styles continue to evolve, there is a timeless charm and wisdom in embracing traditional parenting principles. By prioritizing family values, outdoor play, manners, a strong work ethic, limited screen time, and patience, parents can provide a solid foundation for their children's holistic development. In a world filled with constant change, the classic tried-and-true approach to parenting remains a steadfast guide for nurturing well-rounded, respectful, and resilient individuals.

The world has shifted from conventional child-rearing practices, to what seems to be an inversion of norms, and my opinion is that this shift is intentional. I believe there is a deliberate assault on the traditional family unit, aiming to destabilize the fundamental structure of father, mother, and child, while sidelining the role of God in the family.

However...

I have great confidence in the human species that we'll work this all out. I think we will... but eventually.

How to Raise Analog Kids in a Digital World

(AND NOT MAKE THEM HATE YOU FOR IT)

As a mountain man, creative digital artist, and Dad of 10, author Tommy Latham straddles both the digital and natural worlds. Take a journey down some humorous paths to discover the secrets to keeping your kids rooted in nature, tradition and positivity while the digital and social world attacks from all sides.

"This book is a straightforward guide and it solves a problem: The problem that kids need to live in this world, yet be restricted from certain aspects of it. And that everywhere around them will be other kids doing it differently."

– GoodReads

"An absolute must-read for any modern parent attempting to navigate this digital world."

– Post Sentinel

TOMMY LATHAM
AUTHOR OF THE DAD FORMULA