

Boston College Psychology Professor: "School Has Become a Toxic Place for Children"

More families may be flocking to homeschooling and other schooling alternatives over the past two years, but Peter Gray has been urging families to flee coercive schooling since long before the pandemic began. The Boston College psychology professor wrote in his 2013 book *Free To Learn*: "The more oppressive the school system becomes, the more it is driving people away, and that is good."

Gray joins me on this week's episode of the LiberatED Podcast to talk about the harms of forced schooling and why self-directed education, grounded in play, is most beneficial for youth learning and development.

In our conversation, Gray explains that standard schooling today is a key factor in the continuous rise in rates of childhood and adolescent anxiety, depression, and suicide. Its imposed, one-size-fits all curriculum, reliance on reward and punishment as external motivators, and dismissal of natural childhood curiosity and creativity erode learners' powerful drives for learning and discovery. Stripped of these drives, and increasingly deprived of opportunities to play, explore, and pursue individual interests outside of school without the constant hovering of adults, children and adolescents become more melancholic and morose.

"We adults are constraining children's lives, in school and out of school," says Gray in our podcast discussion. "School has become a toxic place for children, and we refuse to say that publicly. The research can show it but it almost never gets picked up in the popular press," he adds.

Our discussion digs deeper into Gray's research on the link between standard schooling and skyrocketing rates of diagnoses of ADHD, which Gray asserts is essentially "a failure to adapt to the conditions of standard schooling." He talks about the disappearance of childhood play and the corresponding rise in childhood mental health disorders, as well as why parents shouldn't be too concerned about their children's screen time use.

Gray believes that parents should remove their children from standard schooling and embrace schooling alternatives that are centered on self-directed education. "I'm cheered by the ever-growing stream of people who are leaving coercive schooling for relaxed homeschooling, unschooling, Sudbury schooling, and other forms of education that allow children to control their own learning," he wrote in *Free To Learn*.

The current exodus of families away from standard schooling and toward other, often freer, learning models, may have positive, long-term effects on young people's intellectual

development and emotional well-being.