

# The Most Basic Freedom Is Freedom to Quit

*Editor's Pick. Written by Peter Gray.*

In general, children are the most brutalized of people, not because they are small and weak, but because they don't have the same freedoms to quit that adults have. Anthropologists tell me that this is not so true in hunter-gatherer cultures, because children there, to a considerable degree, can quit, much as adults can. Children who are treated unkindly by their parents can move into a different hut, with different adults, who will treat them kindly. They can even move to a different band. Hunter-gatherers don't hold to the notion that parents own their children. Nearly everyone enjoys children, and the whole band shares in the care of every child; so children are not a burden. Even very young children who are mistreated by a parent or another caregiver can move away from that caregiver, or be taken away, and find safety in others' arms. That is not true in our society, and domestic violence against children is a serious and continuing problem.

But now I want to turn to the violence we do to our children by forcing them into schools. When schooling is compulsory, schools are, by definition, prisons. A prison is a place where one is forced to be and within which people are not free to choose their own activities, spaces, or associates. Children cannot walk away from school, and within the school children cannot walk away from mean teachers, oppressive and pointless assignments, or cruel classmates.

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