

Whatever They Want



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OIU-only RSS feed available here.

The one thing that has really taken my relationship with my children to a more peaceful and prosperous level, is the commitment I’ve made to giving them what is theirs by virtue of their humanity, the right to do whatever they want, albeit with a few caveats. Let me explain.

Radical Unschooling

We began unschooling three years ago. What is that? Unschooling is the education philosophy that says that children learn best through play and by following their own interests and passions. Quite the opposite of schooling, hence the name. I discovered unschooling while researching homeschooling options after I became unconvinced that government schools were in any way good or helpful to the development of young minds. I shiver these days when I see hordes of the next generation marching toward their prisons, plantations, and indoctrination centers. When my son made his decision to stay home, I was relieved, excited, and envious (my schooled inner-child). But I also lamented the commitment that unschooling would require of me, that is, the presence, the helpfulness, the patience, the creativity, and the drive that had theretofore been weaknesses of mine.

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Three years later, I’m better at all of those things (not perfect, mind you), and it’s because I’ve realized that, yes, our children should be allowed to do whatever they want, and here’s the *unless*, 1) they’ll unintentionally hurt themselves, 2) they’ll hurt someone else, and 3) they’ll violate someone else’s property rights. But that’s it. If they want to play video games or watch TV all day, eat ice cream for breakfast, stay up all night, roll around in the dirt, *whatever*, they have every right to do so.

What the Crazy?!

Now, I know what some are probably thinking that I’m a nut job. That allowing my kids

these liberties will produce entitlement, sloth, deviance, and a host of other vicious and undesirable traits for people in society to have. But here's the thing, so far, it's only brought peace, prosperity, learning, and growth (for them and me). And not just in my home. I've met or read about countless fellow unschoolers, from kids to adults, who were likewise allowed to do whatever they want, and also became happy, productive members of society. Actually, with their penchant for entrepreneurship and creativity, I consider them the best kind of members that society can have. Also, consider our evolution as a species. Biologically, including our brains, we're still hunter-gatherers, whose children do whatever they want, all day long, all year long, for their entire childhood and young adult life. In other words, we've been programmed by evolution to learn best through *free play*. And that's exactly what my children enjoy.

My Role

In a word, *partnership*. That's the role played by every unschooling parent, to be their child's partner through the business of life. I'm not their ruler nor their master. I'm their partner. Once I accepted that role, I thought about what a partner is. A partner is not there to tell you what to do or to judge you, but instead to help you see clearly the path before you, to assist you, to keep you from unintentionally hurting yourself by making interests and passions safe, to offer insight and wisdom, and just as importantly, to let you fail when you insist on doing something that they might see as foolish, but harmless. There's something to learn in everything we do, win or fail, and a partner opens up the way before you and stands by your side as you make the journey. That's my role as an unschooling parent.

Final Thoughts

As I mentioned, I've yet to overcome my weaknesses and still do the unhelpful and impatient things that I lament doing. My kids are young and this lifestyle is still new to me. But I'm getting better. My relationships with my children are the best they've ever been. They each scream my name and run into my arms the moment I arrive home from work. That's my measurement. If they ever stop, I'll know that I'm starting to fail. And now we have another little one arriving shortly. Yes, my kids are allowed to do whatever they want, and my highest valued work is helping them do it.

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