

# mom

## Overprotective Parenting: Finding Balance & Fostering Independence

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**“I’m not saying kids today are over-protected, but I never had to wear a helmet to make toast!”**

As a Montessori educator and school director, I like to stay on top of recently published education, parenting and child development related books or articles. This April’s issue of the Atlantic features an article that’s been getting a lot of buzz – its cover certainly caught my attention. Entitled **The Overprotected Kid** by Hanna Rosin, the caption on the cover reads *New research shows he’ll grow up to be more fearful and less creative* right beside an image of an eight year-old boy, donning a helmet, knee pads, pillows strapped to his chest holding his over-protective mommy’s hand. This kid looks anything but confident or capable.



This idea that our overprotective parenting culture is detrimental to children’s healthy development seems to be a hot topic these days. Articles like Hanna Rosin’s and books such as Lenore Skenazy’s **Free Range Kids** explore the impact that our safety obsessed culture and today’s modern overprotective parenting ways are preventing our children from becoming resilient, resourceful, creative and independent.

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Gone are the days when kids were sent out to play and explore freely in their neighbourhoods, parks and green spaces, coming home only when the street lights came on. They formed multi-aged communities, collaborated, made mischief. Some led and some followed. They faced real challenges that helped them grow, learn, negotiate and problem solve.

Our modern overprotective parenting culture is giving our children a vastly different experience. Most children I know spend all day in school, only to be picked up and shuttled from one extra-curricular activity to the next. Any free time at home is generally spent in front of a screen. Pretty much every moment of their day is spent fully supervised. Even their social lives are micro-managed, with well meaning adults hovering nearby to help sort out any difficulties or conflicts. It's easy to see why some experts are drawing the conclusion this modern way of parenting is robbing children of many important experiences essential to developing creativity, courage and resilience.

**So, what's the answer?** How do we strike a balance between letting them experience the joys and benefits of a more "free range" childhood with our own need to keep them safe and protected?

Montessori's timeless philosophy of encouraging independence, responsibility, and free choice may hold some answers. Montessori, when it's done right, creates an environment for children that can counter-effect so much of the negative impact of this cultural trend towards *overprotection*. Whether or not your child attends a Montessori school, some of the basic principles, which strike the perfect balance between freedom and limits, can be applied within any family.

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Montessori kids all play very active roles in taking responsibility for their classroom environment, embracing the sense of community and camaraderie that it brings. You might see a group of six and seven year-olds carefully planning their next field trip, taking responsibility for every aspect of planning (making reservations, managing money, arranging transportation). Another group of children might be working together, planning a fundraiser for a cause they've decided to support. A pair of three year olds may be busy preparing snack for their classmates, chopping vegetables and setting the table with breakable dishes. These kids are learning to navigate the world, take on responsibilities, and learn from their mistakes.

Teachers are there to support and guide, but only when needed. When they're not busy giving a lesson, Montessori teachers spend much of their time in the classroom observing and stepping back, allowing real life learning experiences to unfold.

The results are amazing. Self-assured, happy and confident kids who are developing a fundamental belief in themselves. Children who, while they are loved and valued for their own beautiful uniqueness, respected and accepted for who they are, also know that the world doesn't revolve around them. They are part of a community. They have opportunity to mentor and be mentored. Because they are encouraged to make choices and follow their interests, they maintain a strong connection to their own inner voice and learn to trust their instincts. Respect, compassion and accountability are woven into the classroom culture in very real way.

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Though this timeless and universal method is over a hundred years old, I think it has something very unique to offer today's children that goes way beyond academics. It prepares them for the real world. Safety is important. Bike helmets, sunscreen, car seats and diligent supervision are a good thing. But

within that paradigm of reasonable safety measures, we need to look for more opportunities allow children to experience freedom, independence and real responsibility. Because our job is about so much more than just keeping them safe during childhood, it's about preparing them for a happy and successful life.

- See more at: <http://clubmom.ca/overprotective-parenting/#sthash.nWkHThzf.dpuf>