

# Noah's Notes

March 10, 2023

OK, listen up people! If you're a parent – and you are – we need to talk about something.

We give our children too much attention. We do too much for them. We step in, we help out, we pave the way...we are always *there*, doing something for them.

We spend too much time trying to control our children and clear the path in front of them. It's not that we woke up one morning and decided to do this, but actually that the specific cultural moment in which we are parenting has pushed us all into this stance.

While the percentage of working mothers has grown to 70%, from 47% in 1975, American mothers actually spend *more* time actively parenting their children now than in 1975. More work. More parenting. It doesn't add up, right? Why are we doing this? Can't we just let kids...be kids? Need we be so present?

Jennifer Senior came to a remarkable conclusion in her book [“All Joy and No Fun: The Paradox of Modern Parenting”](#): American families have fewer children than ever before, much later in life, and are subject to the parenting-industrial-complex (*consider that before 1930, “child development” wasn’t even a field of study, and prior to 1970, “parenting” as an active verb simply did not exist in the vernacular*), our gaze towards children has become very, very intense. She writes that whereas in earlier generations children were seen as *contributors* to the household economy, helping out around the house or farm or village in meaningful ways, in today's world they have become an object of economic investment. We pour our energy, attention, resources, and finances into our children's well-being because we have fewer of them and so feel compelled to preserve and protect them in order to ensure their success in life.

Senior reported that in middle and upper class families, “each individual child, in our culture of fearful and controlling parenting, is subject to constant attention, vigilance, supervision, surveillance”, and Paula Fass, historian of American childhood, [writes](#), “Today's parents are much more often seen as hovering than hands-off, and their faults lie in excessive supervision, not the reverse.” KJ Dell’Antonia recognizes this in her book, [“How to be a Happier Parent”](#): “We expect our constant attendance itself to be enough to get the job done. We show up relentlessly, as though looking for a good attendance award, when we might teach our children more by being less present.” (*I love that line!!*) Kim Brooks [writes](#) that as a parent she was driven to become “an uncritical consumer of anxiety” (read her dynamite op-ed [here](#)) which forced her to be ever-present with her children – always worried that if she wasn't there, something bad would happen.

We have fewer children, later in life, and are subjected to cultural anxiety – which creates an environment in which we come to believe that our children will only be successful when we are there for them, clearing the way and solving their problems.

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So, what do we do? Well, [read this short article](#). And I've already highlighted the best parts for you! For a deeper dive with more take-aways, look through some previous pieces I've [written](#) on this [topic](#). Or, cut through the noise and go back to the primary source for all of this — [Blessings of a Skinned Knee](#).

I can't offer much on the stress of daily life we all face as working parents. But I can assure you that your children don't need us solving their problems or paving the path forward. My hope is that this gives you permission to use your few non-working daylight hours to focus on the stuff that children most certainly do need from you – lots of tickles, hugs, silliness, and read alouds – while also giving them time without you next to them so they can experience boredom, solitude, and the joy of self-discovery.

Shabbat shalom,  
Noah