

Get On The Floor With Your Kid

For a year and a half, I had worked part-time at an education center that taught children five to fourteen years old how to code using video games. During my first week of work, I was an instructor of a week-long day camp.

On my first day, one of the students experienced a severe mental shutdown. He was uncommunicative and stood perfectly still until his mother arrived to collect him. I was later told in one of my monthly staff meetings that the child was suffering from dyscalculia, ADHD and clinical anxiety.

Dyscalculia is a disorder that impairs the ability to learn math, ADHD stands for “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder”, which affects general brain functioning, and clinical anxiety is a disorder which increases anxiousness and irritability. These diagnoses confused me when I heard about them. How could someone around 7 years old be possibly diagnosed with disorders so severe? Since that meeting, I’ve observed situations on numerous occasions in my interactions with children that reflect this trend of rising mental health disorders. It’s an unsettling statistic that has crept into new families and has to be addressed before the effects are irreversible.

You may have come across a situation like this in a supermarket, restaurant, or on a long flight. A child begins throwing a tantrum, tinging the air with stress and tension. Instead of calming the child down or enacting discipline, the parent instead gives the child a smartphone. The child immediately stops screaming their head off and directs their full attention towards the

screen. Not only does this expose the child to an unhealthy amount of blue light which has shown to worsen eyesight, but shows that the parent, who is an adult, is not capable enough to calm their child down.

This lackadaisical approach to parenting doesn't stop at placating a child with a smartphone. In some cases, parents will endorse their child's behavior, encouraging them to continue throwing temper tantrums in public places, excusing it as a stress-relief activity. I'm in favor of having a healthy environment for children's development, but what stressors could a toddler have? They ran out of their favorite flavor of Gerber applesauce? Their favorite episode of Paw Patrol wasn't on TV today?

From what I've observed, it's not about the child at all. The stem of this problem is the enabling from the parents, or in most situations, a parent.

10% of families or around 5 million children in America were living in a single-parent household in 1950. In 2023, that number is now at 31% of families, or around 25 million children.

On top of those statistics, there has been an increased level of children reporting experiencing anxiety, behavioral problems and depression on a weekly basis. Estimates by the CDC show that between 2016-2019, 5.8 million children in the United States suffered from anxiety, 5.5 million suffered from behavioral problems and 2.7 million suffered from depression.

In 2022, The Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic of North America reported that 21.8% of children in the United States had before experienced one or more depressive disorder symptoms.

In 2015, The Boston University Medical Center published, “Mobile and interactive media use by young children: The good, the bad and the unknown”, an article which goes in depth on the dangers of prolonged screen usage among children. In the article, the author succinctly summarizes the main issue of this urgent problem: “If these devices become the predominant method to calm and distract young children, will they be able to develop their own internal mechanisms of self-regulation?”

I have one more lesson for parents from my experiences with these kinds of children. For the sake of confidentiality, I will refer to this student as John. John came from a single-parent household and was an instigator. When they came into the learning center, they distracted others and didn't do the work that was instructed. They got frustrated easily, even after I had thoroughly helped them. Without fail, John would break down crying. They screamed, “I hate it here! I don't want to do this anymore!” Without fail, their mother came to pick them up early. John's mother knew of their mental problems and frequent meltdowns, but she kept John in the program for more than a year before finally pulling them out, following a severe meltdown in the center.

Now, picture me: I am a 15 year old at the time, being left with calming down a screaming 12 year old while I have another dozen kids staring at me and him. Nobody wants to be in that situation, but I tried my best in assisting him, which some parents seem to have a problem with. If I can do it, I'm sure other parents can, if not better.

Parents have begun acting overtly lazy with raising their children. Even if they think that they're involved in their child's life by enrolling them in "enriching" structured activities, such as team sports, Cub Scouts or extra tutoring, they are actively neglecting their children.

The majority of these parents' don't understand that they are the main enforcers of both behavior and habits. If a child notices a parent engaging in a habit, they are more likely to adopt that habit. If a child sees their parents glued to their phone, they are going to be as addicted to screens as their parents are.

Parents must realize that treating their children like an extension of themselves is downright predatory. Having neurotic meltdowns when their child underperforms in anything sets a terrible example for our next generation of parents. For as much as these parents care about their child's happiness, they go to some extreme lengths in stunting their child's growth for the long-term. If parents like the ones I've described want to truly be involved in their child's lives, they must start engaging with them on an interpersonal level. They should get on the floor with their kid and play with them. **It doesn't hurt.**