



# TURN THEM LOOSE!

“Papa, tell me a story from when you were a boy!” I’ve heard this request so many times from my now ten-year-old twin grandchildren that I’ve had to resort to reruns. For some reason, they love hearing about life in the old days, and my adventures growing up in a neighborhood full of kids. Truth be told, I’m as fascinated with comparing my childhood experience to theirs, as they are with comparing their childhood experience to mine.

Recently, my story-time recollections took them back to that suburban neighborhood outside of Philadelphia and tales of all the different things we kids used to do and get into during those precious after-school hours between getting off the bus and having to head back home for dinner. Of course, there *are* adventures that I wisely haven’t chosen to share with my grandchildren, some of them including fire, knives, BB

guns, rock fights, and trips on foot and bicycles way beyond the boundaries our parents had set for our afternoons. But one recent conversation centered around baseball, a game I grew up loving and playing, and a game which two of my grandsons are playing now. They not only wanted to hear about the different Little League teams on which I played, but were especially interested in our daily spring and summer neighborhood pickup games. Fresh off the bus and quickly out the door in our “play clothes”, we would converge on our backyard field with gloves hung on our handlebars and wooden bats over our shoulders. Bikes were carelessly dropped to the ground, Captains would be appointed, teams would be picked, arguments would ensue, punches might get thrown, and kids would always be getting cut, bruised, and hurt. In between all that, we did manage to get in a game.

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## YOUTH CULTURE

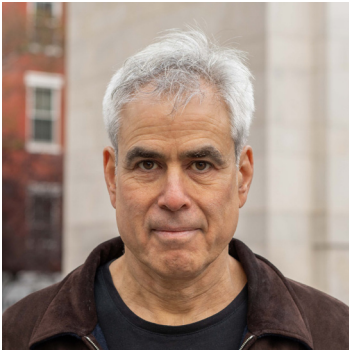
## HOT QUOTE

Billie Eilish, talking about her lifelong struggle with depression. *Rolling Stone*, April 24, 2024.

*“It was just realer than it’s ever been before. My whole life, I’ve never been a happy person, really. I’ve been a joyous person but not a happy person. I experience joy and laughter, and I can find fun in things, but I’m a depressed person. I’ve suffered with a lot of depression my whole life. When things happen in my soul, or whatever, the thing I’ve always held on to is, ‘Well, it’ll pass. It’ll come in waves, and it’ll get worse and it’ll get better.’ And that’s always brought me comfort. And this time, I literally was like, ‘I don’t care. I don’t even want it to get better.’”*



**“IT IS IN UNSUPERVISED, CHILD-LED PLAY WHERE CHILDREN BEST LEARN TO TOLERATE BRUISES, HANDLE THEIR EMOTIONS, READ OTHER CHILDREN’S EMOTIONS, TAKE TURNS, RESOLVE CONFLICTS, AND PLAY FAIR.”**



**Jonathan Haidt**

Then, we’d come back the next day and do it all over again.

For today’s kids, baseball – and virtually all youth sport - is typically of the organized variety. With each passing year, the game takes up much more time and money. Always under adult supervision and direction, there are clinics, camps, practices, and even tournaments with costly travel, and all this long before a young player is out of elementary school! Would I be wrong if I said that to me this all seems far less attractive and beneficial than what I experienced in my real-life version of *The Sandlot* “movie”?

My opinion has been reinforced as I just read Jonathan Haidt’s new book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Simply stated, Haidt makes a compelling case for the fact that the nature of childhood has fundamentally shifted since the late 1980s, from a “play-based childhood” to a “phone-based childhood.” What this means for play is that our kids now tend to stay inside to play and socialize online, leading them to lose exposure to the kind of physical and social experiences that lead kids to develop needed competencies, overcome their fears, and launch into a healthy and resilient adulthood. While Haidt recommends some very noble reforms in regard to smartphones, he

also calls for us to push our kids out the door and into the neighborhood for unsupervised “free play” and greater childhood independence.

Haidt writes, “It is in unsupervised, child-led play where children best learn to tolerate bruises, handle their emotions, read other children’s emotions, take turns, resolve conflicts, and play fair.” If all our kids are doing is spending time focused on their screens, they miss this important developmental opportunity. And if their play is always organized and led by adults, they are missing out on what is the most valuable type of childhood play experience of all. You see, research is showing that our kids *want* to play and *need* to play. When they are deprived of free play, they come out socially, cognitively, and emotionally impaired.

Parents, we want our kids to grow up to be spiritually, relationally, intellectually, and physically healthy and mature adults. These are all aspects of God’s creational design for His image-bearers. I believe that carefully guiding how and where our kids spend their time is crucial if we are to parent in obedience to our calling to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). To that end, send them outside to play!

**WALT MUELLER**  
CPYU President



## FROM THE NEWS

### PUBERTY BLOCKERS AND GENDER

**As conversations in our culture continue over how to navigate the increased traction the transgender ideology is getting among our kids, we should be paying attention to what is happening across the pond in the U.K.**

The world’s largest gender clinic has been the Tavistock clinic in Britain. Health officials are closing the clinic this spring as more and more is being learned about the dangers to our kids regarding what’s labeled as “gender-affirming care.” Not only is the clinic being shut down, but the National Health Service of England has said that children who have or who identify as having gender dysphoria will no longer be given puberty blockers. The NHS says that there is not enough evidence regarding the safety or effectiveness of puberty blockers with children. We applaud this common-sense reality-based move, and hope that all of us will realize just how much life-long damage these supposed treatments cause. God has made us male or female, and gender is given, not chosen.

## TRENDS:

## Pop Stars and Abortion Pills

Do you think that pop music has an influence on the values, attitudes, and behaviors of our kids? The truth is that it's not just the lyrics that influence, but the high-profile lifestyles and stories of the pop stars themselves. Popular singer and Grammy award winner Olivia Rodrigo is one star whose music and lifestyle influence our children and teens. As part of her recent concert in St. Louis, Rodrigo did more than sing to the 22,000 fans assembled at the Enterprise Center. With the help of the Missouri Abortion Fund, Rodrigo handed out free Plan B pills, or morning after emergency contraception pills, to her fans. Standing up for abortion rights is nothing new to Rodrigo as she's been a vocal abortion advocate for years. Parents, we encourage you to listen to who and what your kids are listening to, and then talk about what they are hearing, affirming that which is line with God's Word, and then challenging and correcting that content which advocates sin.



## LATEST RESEARCH:

## Fentanyl and Overdose Deaths

Ever since teenage drug abuse ramped up in the 1960's, schools, mental health professionals, the government, and parents have all been working to stem the tide of abuse and addiction. One of the greatest concerns

has been the very real risk of death from drug overdose. It's likely that many of us have been touched by overdose death, perhaps in our families or circle of friends. Sadly, the latest research tells us that drug overdose deaths among teens more than doubled between 2019 and 2020, and this, in spite of the fact that there was also a decline in teen drug use. We also

know that Fentanyl is now involved in at least 75% of teen overdose deaths. With drug suppliers now mixing fentanyl in with other drugs, we need to exercise greater diligence in warning our kids about drug abuse. Pray that your teens would have a heart bent on following God, and that He would spare them from the scourge of illicit drugs.

## QUICKSTATS

73% of young people ages 15-17 report sometimes or always feeling alone.

*(dcdx marketing)*

About half of Americans say they took part in organized, competitive sports in high school or college. Almost 40% of Americans say they follow college or pro sports at least somewhat closely. If asked to choose one sport as America's sport, over half choose football. And finally, almost 1 of 5 Americans said they had bet money on sports in the past year.

*(Pew Research Center)*



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## CHILDREN'S & YOUNG ADULT SERIES

Best selling book series in the Children's & Young Adult category

**Source:**

*The New York Times*

1. Boys of Tommen by Chloe Walsh Bloom
2. Once Upon a Broken Heart by Stephanie Garber
3. Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney
4. A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson
5. Who Was/Is ... ? by Jim Gigliotti and others
6. Percy Jackson & The Olympians by Rick Riordan
7. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
8. Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling
9. The Wild Robot by Peter Brown
10. The Summer I Turned Pretty Trilogy by Jenny Han



## SLEEPUNDERS

by WALT MUELLER

One of my favorite memories of childhood was reaching the age where from time to time, my parents would allow me to sleep over at a friend's house. I remember the joy of staying up late, watching movies, and eating pizza with a group of buddies.

My kids experienced sleepovers as well. In today's world, there's a movement away from sleepovers that I think is warranted.

We live in a world where we're learning more and more about predators and sexual abuse. When a child is a victim of sexual abuse, 90% of them know their attacker. Half of those known abusers are family members, and the other half are acquaintances and friends. Prudence should cause us to err on the side of caution. The truth is that once kids are asleep, they are doing something they could also be doing at home.

Now, parents are okaying what's called "sleepunders", where the kids get picked up at bedtime, or when their parents are done visiting together. This is a sensible solution to lower the risk of problems that can arise at a traditional sleepover. Parents, don't live in fear, but exercise wisdom.

# FROM THE WORD

Have you ever meditated on the finished work of Creation and what God thought and said as He stepped back to look at what He had made? Genesis 1:31 tells us that after creating human beings - the divine image-bearers who were the crowning point of all that He had made - God saw and said that it was all "very good."

The beauty of the created world is all around us. Because we live in it 24/7 we might fall into taking it for granted, never or rarely noticing the complexity and beauty in ways that leave us full of wonder and worship. In today's world, where our attention is focused on our screens for hours on end, we are even more prone to miss the manner in which the heavens and earth declare the glory of God.

**"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."**

**Genesis 1:31**

As parents, we are called to point our kids to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and then nurture them in the faith so that they grow up to love, serve, and represent Christ. One way to feed their spiritual growth and development is to get them outside and into God's world. . . which even though it is marred by sin, is still held together by His hand of providence. All creation continues to scream "Glory to God!", and we will miss it if we choose to remove ourselves from it.

During the mid-1800s, the 29-year-old Foliott S. Pierpoint was living in a world void of smartphones, computers, tablets, and TVs. He loved to spend time outside, and was consistently overwhelmed by the beauty of the English countryside where he lived. He was prompted by this beauty to write a hymn of praise that many of us still sing today: *For The Beauty of the Earth*. Get outside with your children and teens so that you might notice what Pierpoint wrote about: the glory of the skies, the wonder of day and night, the joy of looking at trees and flowers, and the joy of the sun, moon, and stars. He gives us words to use as we look: "Lord of all, to Thee we raise, This our hymn of grateful praise." Let's make sure that we and our kids don't miss it!



## PODCAST



**The WORD**  
in Youth Ministry

A CPYU PODCAST

*The Word in Youth Ministry*

*is a podcast from CPYU for youth workers by youth workers.*

**BE SURE TO CHECK OUT EPISODE 63:**

**"TRAINING TEENAGERS  
FOR SUFFERING"  
WITH TIM CHALLIES**

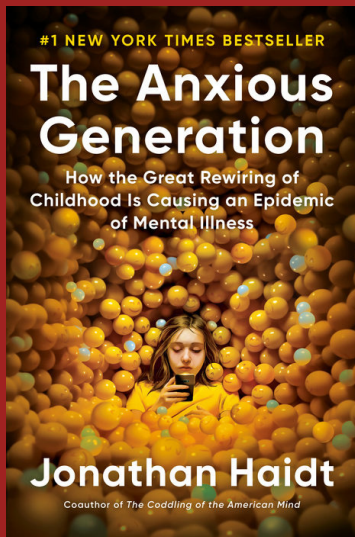


**LISTEN AT [WWW.CPYU.ORG/TWIYM](http://WWW.CPYU.ORG/TWIYM)**





# HELPFUL RESOURCES



## BOOK

After more than a decade of stability or improvement, the mental health of adolescents plunged in the early 2010s. Rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures. Why?

In *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt lays out the facts about the epidemic of teen mental illness that hit many countries at the same time. He then investigates the nature of childhood, including why children need play and independent exploration to mature into competent, thriving adults. Haidt shows how the “play-based childhood” began to decline in the 1980s, and how it was finally wiped out by the arrival of the “phone-based childhood” in the early 2010s. He presents more than a dozen mechanisms by which this “great rewiring of childhood” has interfered with children’s social and neurological development, covering everything from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness, social contagion, social comparison, and perfectionism. He explains why social media damages girls more than boys and why boys have been withdrawing from the real world into the virtual world, with disastrous consequences for themselves, their families, and their societies.

Most important, Haidt issues a clear call to action. He diagnoses the “collective action problems” that trap us, and then proposes four simple rules that might set us free. He describes steps that parents, teachers, schools, tech companies, and governments can take to end the epidemic of mental illness and restore a more humane childhood.

Haidt has spent his career speaking truth backed by data in the most difficult landscapes—communities polarized by politics and religion, campuses battling culture wars, and now the public health emergency faced by Gen Z. We cannot afford to ignore his findings about protecting our children—and ourselves—from the psychological damage of a phone-based life.

While you may take issue with Haidt’s atheism, his commonsense insights make this a must-read for all parents.