

## Free-range parenting laws letting kids roam could catch on

BY LINDSAY WHITEHURST  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — After Utah passed the country's first law legalizing so-called free-range parenting, groups in states from New York to Texas are pushing for similar steps to bolster the idea that supporters say is an antidote for anxiety-plagued parents and over-scheduled kids.

Free-range parenting is the concept that giving kids the freedom to do things alone — like explore a playground or ride a bike to school — makes them healthier, happier and more resilient.

It surfaced nearly a decade ago, when Lenore Skenazy touched off a firestorm with a column about letting her then-9-year-old son ride the New York City subway alone. Since then, she's become a vocal advocate for free-range parenting.

Critics say letting kids strike out on their own can expose them to serious dangers, from criminals to cars. Parents have been investigated by child-welfare authorities in several high-profile cases, including a Maryland couple who allowed their 10- and 6-year-old children to walk home alone from a park in 2015. But lawmakers and policy groups in several states say the protective pendulum has swung too far, and it's time to send a message that parents who raise their children in a healthy environment can grant them more freedom. Utah's new law specifies that it isn't neglectful to let well-cared-for children travel to school, explore a playground or stay in the car alone if they're mature enough to handle it.

Free-range parenting differs from the concept of latchkey kids, or those who take care of themselves after school, in that it generally emphasizes getting kids outside in the neighborhood as a way to develop independence, Boston-based clinical psychologist Bobbi Wegner said.

Fears about letting kids make their own way date at least in part to cases like Etan Patz, who was among the first missing children pictured on milk cartons after disappearing while he walked to his New York City bus stop alone in 1979.

Meanwhile, as education has become more essential in the



COURTESY PHOTO

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workforce, parents are increasingly eager to give their kids a leg up with lessons in everything from coding to cello.

"We sign our kids up for all these activities — tutoring, different things — to create this perfect resume from a very young age, but it's really at a detriment to the kid's mental health," Wegner said.

While giving kids independence with parent oversight helps, it's hard for adults to escape pressure to hover, she said.

"Parents need permission to do this," Wegner said. A self-avowed free-range parent, she said a police officer once knocked on her door and threatened to call child services after seeing her then-3-and-a-half-year-old son standing at the end of the driveway talking to neighborhood kids. She'd like to see Massachusetts follow Utah's lead.

In New York, Democratic state Assemblyman Phil Steck said he's gearing up to introduce a similar proposal.

"When I was a child, you let your dogs and your children out after breakfast and ... they had to be home for dinner," he said. "I felt I gained a lot more from just

playing on the street than my children did from being in organized sports activities."

It's an idea that cuts across the ideological spectrum. Brandon Logan with the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation is working with lawmakers for a bill next year.

"We expect adults to be independent, and we expect parents to raise their children to be independent, and you can't do that whenever children are being micromanaged," Logan said.

A conservative group is also pushing for a bill in Idaho, and an Arkansas lawmaker whose effort failed plans to bring it back again.

They're all taking a close look at Utah's law, which sailed through the Legislature and was signed by the governor of the majority-Mormon state known for big families and wide-open spaces. It doesn't specify how old kids should be to do things alone, which lawmakers say will allow authorities to weigh each case separately.

Discretion like that is important, said Stephen Hinshaw, a University of California, Berkeley psychology professor. Not every child is ready to ride their bike alongside busy roads,

and participating in things like music lessons can teach them important skills.

"Parents have to be smart about what is helping foster self-reliance and what is putting kids in a dangerous spot," he said. Amy Coulter, a stay-at-home Utah mom of four girls and a boy, said she doesn't call herself a free-range parent.

But she does avoid intervening with teachers on her older kids' grades and encourages her kids use their own money to buy things at the grocery store.

"I want them to know that they're capable," she said of her children, who range in age from 5 to 14.

In her Lehi neighborhood, kids often roam the block "snack-hopping" at different homes.

Recent Utah transplant Krista Whipple said she's liked the concept of free-range parenting for years, but it was tough to practice it in her old Los Angeles neighborhood when most kids stayed behind fences.

"I didn't want to raise my kids all cooped up, but it always made me think twice," said Whipple, a program manager at a St. George youth homeless shelter who has two boys and a girl who are 6, 4 and 3.

## April showers

We are two weeks into April, but for the majority of that time it has felt like we've been trapped eternally in winter. With the beauty of spring, we often feel it is the most glorious of the seasons. Days get longer, the weather begins to warm up and the brown, dead earth comes to life. Summer, winter and fall may have their fans, but spring is clearly the most lovable of the four seasons.

I challenge you to use your imagination on these left-



SANDY SARE

over days of winter to celebrate the beauty and joy of the season to come. Warmer weather is on the horizon, and with it comes some delightful

sayings and quotes connected to spring.

"April showers bring May flowers."

This age-old saying still holds true today. How did this saying originate? The short poem, as we know it today, originates all the way back to 1157, as written by Thomas Tusser. The poem goes as follows: "Sweet April showers, Do spring May flowers." There are other, longer versions of poems that share this saying as well.

Other sayings, perhaps not as well known, share some quirkiness and positive outlook for the season to come:

*"It's Spring fever. That is what the name of it is. And when you've got it, you want oh, you don't quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!"*

— Mark Twain

*"Spring is the time of year when it is summer in the sun and winter in the shade."*

— Charles Dickens

*"Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party.'"*

— Robin Williams

*"The promise of spring's arrival is enough to get anyone through the bitter winter."*

— Jen Selinsky

*"Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart."*

— Victor Hugo

*"No matter how long the winter, spring is sure to come."*

— Proverb

*"Bloom where you are planted."*

1 Corinthians 7:20-24

*"Some old-fashioned things like fresh air and sunshine are hard to beat."*

— Laura Ingalls Wilder

But, for just a chuckle or two I'll end with this, "If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring?" Give up? Pilgrims of course!

SANDY SARE is the membership director of the Sheridan County YMCA.

## Number, severity of brain injuries raises dementia risk

BY CARLA K. JOHNSON  
AP MEDICAL WRITER

SEATTLE (AP) — A large study offers more evidence of a link between traumatic brain injuries and dementia

later in life, with repeated injuries and severe ones posing the greatest danger.

Researchers analyzed 36 years of health records of 2.8 million people in Denmark, where a national health sys-

tem makes it possible to explore connections in a far-reaching way.

Overall, the risk was small. About 95 percent of people who suffered a brain injury never developed dementia.

But a single severe brain injury increased the risk of later dementia by 35 percent compared with a person who never had brain trauma. A mild brain injury increased the risk by 17 percent. Each additional brain injury added to the danger.

Overall, the risk of dementia was 24 percent higher for people with a traumatic brain injury compared with people without one. The study

was published Tuesday in the journal *Lancet Psychiatry*. A study of 3.3 million people in Sweden earlier this year showed similar results.

Despite the size of the studies, they won't settle scientific questions — or social debate — about brain injuries from sports, war, car crashes or domestic violence.

Scientists know that a blow to the head can damage brain cells, but they don't know exactly how that might lead to later cognitive problems, said lead researcher Dr. Jesse Fann of University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle.

This kind of study

can't prove a cause-and-effect relationship, but researchers tried to eliminate the possible effect of age, gender, marital status and health, including depression. And they looked at other types of trauma, such as broken bones, and found that brain injuries were more closely tied to dementia. In a commentary in the journal, Dr. Carol Brayne of University of Cambridge's medical school in England wrote that improvements in care mean more people are surviving brain injuries, making it crucial to understand more about their long-term effects.

### SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- Come join The Hub on Smith at the annual Eatons' Ranch lunch trip set for May 9. After lunch, the group will have time to explore the sites. The trip will depart from Heritage Towers, The Hub and Tongue River Valley Community Center. Call The Hub's front desk for additional information at (307) 672-2240. Reservation and payment should be made by May 2.
- Are you a new employee, new volunteer or new to the community? Join

Carmen Rideout, executive director of The Hub, to learn more about the center and mission April 16 from 1-2:30 p.m. at The Hub. RSVP by calling The Hub's front desk. The Hub is located at 211 Smith St.

- Take a stroll on the Sheridan pathways through the Hume Draw and Kendrick Mansion area April 19. The group will gather at The Hub Café at 11:30 a.m. for lunch then leave for the hike at 12:30 p.m., returning at 3 p.m.

It's rated as an easy hike. Sign up by Monday at The Hub's front desk.

- The annual Keystone Awards are set for April 19 at the WYO Performing Arts and Education Center. Drinks and hors d'oeuvres will be served at 5:30 p.m. The awards presentation begins at 7 p.m. Proceeds from the event help support senior programs. Tickets are still available at the WYO box office and at wyotheater.com.



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Fri- French Dip Au Jus  
Sat- Turkey Pot Pie  
Sun - Chicken Fried Steak  
Mon- Breaded Pork Chop

\*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

**UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS**

|                              |                        |                   |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Tue- Burgers & Bluegrass     | 7:00 p.m.              | Café              |
| Wed- Gentle Yoga Balance     | 10:30 a.m.             | Community Room    |
| Thurs -Hike Sheridan Pathway | 11:30 lunch at The Hub | Depart 12:30 p.m. |
| Fri - Table Tennis           | 1:00 p.m.              | Fitness Room      |
| Sat- Double Deck Pinochle    | 12:30 p.m.             | Tech Nook         |
| Mon- Happy Feet Cardio Dance | 8:00 a.m.              | Fitness Room      |

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street  
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

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