

INSIGHTS

Going beyond the fishbowl



It's a quirk of nature that the extent of our growth is determined by our immediate environment. For instance, a fearsome shark will only grow five centimetres long if it spends all its life in a fish bowl. Put that shark in the sea and will grow to five metres or more. A shark's genes may provide the blueprint, but its growth will be restricted by the size of its immediate environment.

The same principle applies to children. Restrict them to a safe, insular environment and their capacity for reaching their full potential will be limited. Getting kids to go beyond the fishbowl and be part of the wider world is how we prepare them for the career-fluid future that awaits them.

Recently, I wrote a foreword for a soon to be released parenting book written by South African authors Nikki Bush and Graeme Codrington titled "*Future proof your child for the 2020s and beyond*". The authors described the future that our children are entering as full of exponential and disruptive change led by technology and shifting social mores. They reasoned that in the world of work and enterprise that awaits today's generation of children and young people, creativity, problem-solving, design, big picture thinking and risk-taking will be richly rewarded. According to Bush and Codrington, the future will belong to the kids who are going beyond the fishbowl, willing to expand their physical and mental horizons.

American parenting icon Lenore Skenazy, founder of the free-range parenting movement is a long-time advocate for parents giving kids the freedom they need to explore their neighbourhoods and take safe risks.

Dubbed "America's Worst Mom" for allowing her nine-year old son to ride the New York subway on his own in 2008, Skenazy has been an outspoken advocate for allowing kids more freedom and unsupervised time. She maintains that kids are "safer and smarter than our culture believes." Like Bush and Codrington, Skenazy encourages parents to allow kids to jump out the fishbowl of school, family and their immediate neighbourhood and encourage them to explore their capabilities in the wider world. She acknowledges that allowing kids the same type of freedoms that previous generations enjoyed takes significant parental courage.

If kids are to be truly resilient and make the most of the exciting but uncertain future that awaits them, it's more important than ever to loosen the reins so that both generations – children and parents- experience more freedom.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.