

“Too Young” To Know What’s Best, but “Old Enough” To Know Better
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Times have changed!

Things aren’t the way they used to be compared to when you were growing up.

I know you’re trying to help me, but ... “Can’t you side with me just this once?”

I don’t understand why you won’t just listen to what I’m trying to say!!”

Why can’t you just see that we care about you?

We are trying to help you but ... “You just don’t listen to us anymore!!”

This is the conversation I’ve had countless times with my parents as they reprimand me for dealing with situations the way I do. What could’ve been a conversation easily resolved has now turned into a full-blown argument at the dinner table. As teenagers, we think we know more than our parents, but more often than not, our parents have the upper hand. Conversations such as this usually get heated, but at the end of the day, both parties just want to be heard, *really* heard. Nowadays, this miscommunication between adults and teenagers causes a view on how involved teenagers are in the “stream of life” as Pearl Buck calls it, in “My Neighbour’s Son”. The youth of our generation are disconnected from the realities of life and society only becomes aware of this once we reach our teenage years. This is because society squanders its young people and their potential, children are being brought up overly safeguarded by their parents, and our youth lacks decision-making skills and therefore, struggle to uphold responsibilities due to adults constantly taking control.

The youth of our world can only do so much. We try to speak up, but unfortunately, we are not seen, heard, nor accepted. Our lives are full of contradictions: we are told to voice our opinions and speak out for what we believe in, but, when we do, our opinions get shut down or disregarded almost immediately; we should socialize with others but when we do, we are too loud and we cause trouble; we are viewed as “too young” to know what’s best for us, but we must be “old enough” to know better. Buck says, “I believe the child should be taught from the very first that time whole world is his world, that adult and child share one world, that all generations are needed.” She believes that everyone has a role to play – a “duty” to uphold in society. Although there are differences between children, teenagers, and adults, everyone lives in the same world; we all experience this life together and it’s important that society doesn’t try to cage children and teenagers into a separate “child world” or “fantasy world,” away from the real world. In an article by Daniel Kraemer, he mentions, “Her [Greta Thunberg] small campaign had a global effect, inspiring thousands of young people across the world to organise their own strikes.” Because one teenage girl pushed her way into the “stream of life” to voice her opinion, a domino effect occurred in which many other youths follow her actions. Unfortunately, we can’t be all public figures like Thunberg, but each one of us still has something to offer, whether it’s in our homes or in our communities; we have a purpose – a chance to do something special. As we grow up, we should be treated as we were when we were toddlers. Although our parents guided us, *we* took the first step; *we* learned how to walk because they allowed us the freedom to do something so simple. Something as pure as walking, made such a big difference in our lives

because from the first step, we learned to run. The youth of our society all have potential, and if they are only aware of this once they reach their teenage years, they will spend time, time that feels like a lifetime, lost – floating and drifting through life.

Some might say that we are involved since we do have some youth who forge ahead to inject themselves into the “stream of life”; they are those brave enough to voice their opinion and advocate for those who can’t stand up for themselves. Figures such as Ikram Jaoui (a twenty-three-year-old women’s rights activist from Morocco, who strives to prevent sexual and gender-based violence) and Kenidra Roshay Woods (a twenty-one-year-old activist for mental health, gun violence reform, police brutality, and Black Lives Matter), have stepped up to the plate, trying to make a difference in our world and there are still many more out there who can make a difference if they are just given the chance! Especially due to social media, our generation has many “influencers” who use social platforms to create entertaining content or to spread the word on current events.

Unfortunately, the world is rough nowadays. When you turn on the news, you hear many stories about sad events. Because of this, parents try to shield their children from as much bad and danger as they can while they are growing up which ultimately results in their lack of knowledge of the scary moments that life has in store for them. If, as a child, we are only being exposed to the good, the bad times will feel unbearable, and we won’t know what to do with ourselves. Since we spent so much time being sheltered and nurtured, our troubles will feel like the end of the world because our view of society shifted in an instant. Teenagers have been brought up “softer” than past generations and everyone suffers the consequences when we do not know how to deal with problems. In our minds, we have two solutions: lash out or become repressed. We lash out by showing ourselves off to the world, doing whatever “feels right,” like running away or going for a drive anywhere but home; Buck said, “... the house is really empty and I do not blame the son for leaping in to the car and riding away ...” Running away from problems seems to be the easier choice, but we can also become internal and repressed – we tend to close ourselves off from the world, wanting to be surrounded only by the comfort of our rooms; it’s either one or the other. These are the choices we make when trying to deal with our problems; but at times, we turn to excitement. Buck states, “... children today crave scenes of violence,” which is true. We are drawn to violence – we are curious because it is something we were unaware of growing up. When I was younger, I remember my parents watching the news and I noticed my dad would change the channel once topics such as sexual assault and murders were spoken about. I didn’t think too much of it at the time, but I now realize that he tried to protect me. David Elkin’s *The Hurried Child* describes a child forced to grow up “too-fast-too-soon.” Maybe the reason my dad changed the channel was so that I wouldn’t lose my innocence and my lively view of the world too quickly – he didn’t want to have to explain to me that society can become corrupted, and he didn’t want me to have to grow up “too-fast-too-soon.” He could not bear to watch his little girl grow up, questioning all the bad in the world. It was a nice childhood; I always strived to see the good in everything (as I still do), but now that I’m older, I become uncomfortable with unfamiliar situations. For example, when I’m on the street and I see a protest, I do not know what to do or how to react. Thoughts flood into my brain and I wonder: should I join them, do I stand up for what is right, what is even right in this situation? These are the questions I’m faced with because I do not have the knowledge to make my own decision; this

leads to teenagers' lack of control which causes us to make irrational decisions and disregard our responsibilities.

In an article titled, "Why Your Teenager Can't Use a Hammer," Cynthia Reynolds mentions, "We see 13-year-olds who can't do up buttons or tie laces ... Parents just avoid it by buying Velcro and T-shirts." In this case, the act of tying a shoe is not a complicated one, but because parents have decided to make the choice to give children the "easier option," once they've reached their teen years, they still have no idea how to do something so simple. Regarding buttons, if a child never learns, are they always going to have their parents doing it for them? No, this is not how it should be. When they get older, they cannot show up to a formal event wearing a T-shirt and Velcro shoes. Yes, it would be challenging to teach them at such a young age, but the teaching of these acts lies beyond just tying shoes and doing up buttons – children must be taught that everything cannot be handed to them on a silver platter: they can't always have the "easier option." They will eventually have to be responsible and learn how to take care of themselves. In Todd Seal's paper, "What Students Need, But Don't Get," he mentions, "... piercing, tattoos, dye jobs, sex, and drugs are so popular in teenage years ... your body is one of the few things you actually have control over at that age." We have grown up expecting to accept all the decisions being made for us. Teenagers understand that it is a difficult ask to allow us to make our own decisions – a parent's worst fear is seeing the fall of their children and being unable to help them, but our teenage years are meant for us to experiment and experience. Marie von Ebner Eschenbach said, "In youth we learn; in age we understand." These are the years we will fall and get back up, but we cannot do this unless our parents allow us to. Life is a series of ups and downs and if we have spent over a decade from the time we were born, powerless and impotent, having adults dictating our every move, we lose the ability to make rational decisions, which essentially leads to trouble. When our parents were growing up, they had many responsibilities and duties to carry out. Now, all they want is for us to concentrate on ourselves and they can do everything else. We were brought up to focus on our schooling, extracurriculars – on ourselves; we struggle with multi-tasking because most of us do not comprehend the significance of carrying out our responsibilities. Buck mentions that "I would see to it that even first-graders know that they are citizens ... they have duties. They would be given no privileges but they would have rights." If she were in charge, she would make sure that the children in society grow up aware of the responsibilities they have. We should not be passing through life uneducated of our duties and obligations because without realizing it, we are being shaped into someone who doesn't know what to do or how to approach situations when reality hits us.

In conclusion, the youth of our generation are detached from society's "stream of life" due to our upbringing. We grow up trying to make the most of our oppressed potential – still somewhere deep inside of us just waiting to be released, our coddled nature, and the inability to be responsible and make rational decisions. Because of this, we must strive to join the "stream of life," no matter how challenging, demanding, or taxing it may be; otherwise, society will be left to deal with the consequences, and we'll spend the rest of our days in desolation and despair, constantly searching for "something" but eventually left unfulfilled.

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David Elkind. (1981 – published) *The Hurried Child*.