Louise Roberts

17/08/2016

Cotton wool kids: they’re not even safe in the great indoors

**The fundamental building blocks of childhood resilience are under ­attack as never before. Last week Queensland cops in the remote town of Miles were treating parents like criminals by fining them for letting their**[**kids walk or ride bikes unsupervised to school**](http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/do-your-kids-walk-or-ride-to-school-by-themselves-you-could-be-breaking-the-law/news-story/d45f1daefac034cb0a7aef961285c88b)**.**

Well, stand by with that emergency wad of cotton wool because killjoys have a new kids’ activity in their sights — the potentially fatal act of indoor trampolining.

The increasingly popular pastime is in the dock for causing too many injuries and should be classed as an emerging “public health concern”, we’re told by Neuroscience Research Australia.

This wallop with the PC sledgehammer would ludicrously align the perceived life or death act of jumping on a bouncy net with the gravitas of real medical tragedies, such as the national shortage of organ and blood donors.

But, hey, let’s just regulate our kids into an existence where we are too scared to let them run, jump and climb for fear they may break a bone or a sweat in the name of adventure and development.

Risk isn’t the enemy of parenting. That honour is comprehensively owned by the exhausting hyper-protective, bubble-wrapping hysteria and experts whom we increasingly allow to define us as a “good mum or dad”.

I would rather let my son risk falling and smashing his elbow while enjoying an afternoon of trampolining or skateboarding than hold his hand while he becomes an expert in fearful living.

If you’ve been to one of these indoor trampoline centres, you’ll know the drill. A typical scene is children in socks breathless and bouncing with delight as they jump and flip with their friends.

The signs are there, warning kids not to bounce in big groups. Surely the onus is on parents too, to deliver to their sons and daughters a few pointers on technique, if necessary.

Sometimes there will be a clash of limbs or heads but most can be soothed with an ice pack or Band-Aid. But now it’s panic stations, via a six-month audit of children under 17 admitted to Sydney Children’s Hospital in Randwick which found that 40 of them were treated for indoor trampoline-related ­injuries.

These included broken bones and fractures, plus ankle sprains and soft tissue damage (55 per cent of cases) triggered by contact with the actual net and surrounding structures such as the protective padding. In eight cases, the study says the injury was triggered by different sized kids all using the trampoline together.

It’s basic physics — a ‘larger bouncer’ transfers their energy to the ‘smaller bouncer’, possibly causing an awkward or mistimed landing. So tell your kids not to do it.

Newsflash: kids sometimes get hurt having fun and growing up. The doctors acknowledge their sample size was small and that some kids were rushed to hospital merely because it is a “recognised trauma centre”. They also admit trampolining is a brilliantly entertaining cardiovascular exercise.

I am not diluting the seriousness of childhood ­injuries, but there is nothing “safe” in childhood and it is vital we embrace fun and crucial challenges to help children blossom into the articulate, independent adults we all claim we want to raise.

Think about the number of kids who got injured in organised sport last weekend, my son included, who got a face palm and blood nose during a rugby game. Are we to make kids hesitant about sport, or any other activity, because of a perceived “public health concern”?

Not for the first time, I wonder how I survived my own childhood.

We used to jump off fences and nail sheets of plastic to the lawn before pouring over a bottle of Palmolive so we could slide through bubbles all afternoon. A bike was ridden from breakfast to dinner time and you didn’t go blubbering to mummy and daddy because you copped a hosing from the neighbour’s children.

You waited another day and hosed them right back. I feel sorry for kids who will never get to play road cricket or build a tree house. A colleague built a cubby on the roof of her house as a child and it took her parents six months to notice. Oh, and they had an asbestos roof.

A trampoline injury was a rite of passage, as was jumping off a cliff into the surging ocean. We weren’t reckless — just inquisitive, challenging and adventurous.

Yes, we broke our bones, grazed our knees, had stitches and the dreaded tetanus ­injection.

Now we are convincing ourselves that childhood is more dangerous for our kids than it was for us while moaning that they are getting fatter and lazier, proving our shameful national statistic that one in four of them is obese.

Let them stumble and fall and help them get up. They will thank you for it one day.

Trampolining is not a public health concern — save the medical angst for brutal diseases that really kill our ­children.

*Twitter @whatlouthinks*