

# Raising Resilient Kids in a Screen-Filled World

## The Problem

Childhood anxiety and depression are at [record highs](#), while real-world skills are declining. Increased [screen time](#) and [reduced independent play](#) have left many children unprepared for everyday challenges. From 2003 to 2022, teen face-to-face socializing dropped over [45%](#), and more than half of teens now spend at least [four hours a day](#) on social media.

## Understanding Childhood Independence

Childhood independence is the freedom for kids to think, decide, and act without constant adult supervision. It grows through [unstructured play](#) and opportunities to take age-appropriate risks—like walking or biking to school. Schools that support free play see [fewer behavioral issues](#), yet vague neglect laws often discourage parents from allowing independence. Despite [historically low crime rates](#), [many](#) still fear legal or safety risks.

## Why it Matters

Independence builds confidence, problem-solving skills, and resilience—key traits for mental health, learning, and lifelong success.

## State Strategies for Fostering Independence

Promoting childhood independence is more than a parenting concern – it’s a policy opportunity, and states play a critical role in helping children develop autonomy in today’s tech-driven environment. States can:

Clarify child neglect laws to ensure state policies support age-appropriate independence.

- [Utah](#) (2018) was the first state to pass a Free-Range Parenting Law, stating that children can engage in independent activities, such as walking to school or traveling to nearby recreational areas, without it being considered neglect.

Encourage collaboration between state agencies, schools, and families to create environments where children can explore and make decisions independently.

- As the nation’s first Let Grow “[Lighthouse State](#),” the South Carolina Department of Education is partnering with the [Let Grow Movement](#) to expand device-free play in schools through [Let Grow Play Clubs](#). The state is also prioritizing parental engagement through the [Let Grow Experience](#), a series of home-based independence challenges for K-12 students.

When children explore, make choices, and tackle challenges on their own, they develop the skills needed for academic, social, and emotional success. State leaders can foster this growth by promoting childhood independence, helping students build confidence and resilience for life.

*If you would like to be connected with additional resources or advocacy support from our partners at the [Let Grow Movement](#) or [The Anxious Generation](#), please contact Heather at [HeatherH@excelined.org](mailto:HeatherH@excelined.org)*

