

Ben Greenfield Fitness

“The Ultimate Guide To Unschooling: Top Tips To Create Free-Thinking, Resilient, Creative Young Humans Who Can Thrive In A Modern World.”

Guest: Judy Arnall

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These days, traditional school—such as a public or private school—is only one of many options to get an education. You've probably heard of homeschooling (I was personally homeschooled K-12). But another method that isn't as well known is known as "unschooling"

So what is unschooling?

It's a method of education I've recently adopted for my boys using resources such as the book "[Unschooling To University - Relationships Matter Most In A World Crammed With Content](#)".

Many parents are frustrated by the school system, perhaps because of bullying, crowded classrooms, and outdated, dull, online courses. Disengaged learners that have no say in their coerced curriculum tend to act out, tune out, or drop out. Education must change and unschooling is the fastest growing alternative method of learning.

Two decades ago, students registered with their local school based on their house address. Now, with the internet, students are borderless. Learning can occur anywhere, anytime, anyway and from anyone - including self-taught.

Self-directing their education, unschoolers learn through:

- *Play*
- *Projects*
- *Reading*
- *Volunteering*
- *Games*
- *Sports*
- *Mentorship*
- *Travel*
- *Life*

In this scenario, it's then the parents' job to provide an environment rich in resources: books, videos, cameras, computer and video games, workbooks, textbooks, projects, jobs, museums, field trips, volunteer programs, atlases and maps, science centers, zoos, museums, theaters, TV, toys, concerts, musical instruments, board games, mentor and apprenticeship programs, music, internet, libraries, instructors, living history parks, art

galleries and supplies, sporting venues and equipment, science equipment, corporate venues, parks, travel, and many more.

In her book [Unschooling To University](#), my guest on this podcast, [Judy Arnall](#), explores the path of [30 unschooled children](#) who self-directed all or part of their education and were accepted by universities, colleges, and other postsecondary schools. Most have already graduated.

She outlines that what children need most are close relationships - parents, teachers, siblings, relatives, coaches, and mentors within a wider community, not just within an institutional school.

Educational content is everywhere. Caring relationships are not. Families that embrace unschooling do not have to choose between a quality education and a relaxed, connected family lifestyle. They can have both.

Judy is a keynote speaker and distinguished toastmaster who gives interactive presentations around the world. She specializes in non-punitive parenting and education practices, and regularly appears on television interviews on CBC, CTV, and Global as well as publications including Chatelaine, Today's Parent, Canadian Living, Parents magazine, The Globe and Mail, Metro and Postmedia News.

As a Certified Canadian Family Life Educator (CCFE), she teaches brain and child development, and family communication, at the University of Calgary, Continuing Education, and has taught for Alberta Health Services for 13 years. She founded the non-profit organizations, Attachment Parenting Canada Association, and Unschooling Canada Association.

She is also the bestselling author of the following print and e-books:

- [Discipline Without Distress](#): 135 Tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery.
- [Plugged-In Parenting](#): Connecting with the digital generation for health, safety and love. (DVD)
- [The Last Word on Parenting Advice](#). (A lovely little journal)
- [Parenting With Patience](#): Turn frustration into connection with 3 easy steps."
- [Attachment Parenting Tips Raising Toddlers to Teens](#).
- [Unschooling To University](#): Relationships matter most in a world crammed with content.

As a parent of five children, who were raised without any kind of punishment, Judy has a broad understanding of the issues facing parents and the digital generation. She is the proud parent of several university graduates who self-directed their education.

During our discussion, you'll discover:

-When formal schools were first established, and why...9:00

- Schools began around the time of the Industrial Revolution; was a means of keeping kids occupied while parents worked in factories
- Critics claim it's simply to create factory worker mentality; obedient citizens, quashing critical thinking
- It has transformed into a billion dollar industry; it's difficult to imagine life without institutionalized school
- The brain interacts with its environment; it's not a bucket to fill up with facts and figures

-Where the modern school system has failed us as a whole...13:00

- Schools have stress for kids as well as teachers
- Teaching is a highly stressful profession
- Kids experience stress via bullying, expectations, etc.
- The big failure: a one size fits all approach
- It does not encourage individualism; it can't because it's a bureaucracy
- Technology has revolutionized many facets of life; formal education lags behind

-What is unschooling, and how does it differ from homeschooling...20:05

- "Empowering the learner to choose what they learn, when (or if) they learn, and how they learn."
- It's a matter of control and ownership
- With homeschooling, the parents control and own the process
- In unschooling, the skills and knowledge are learned and embedded with the experience, applied through their curiosity
- Self-directed, free learning

-The value of play and unstructured time when it comes to learning...24:40

- Kids need a period of time to "deschool"
 - Approximately 1 month for each year they're in school
- Their natural curiosity takes over and they embrace
- We underestimate the value of play and downtime: it gives your brain rest and time to think about creative ideas
- Research shows that play and daydreaming is a sign of a better-equipped brain (similar to meditation)
 - Overscheduling doesn't allow for this quality time
- Unstructured play means it's not dictated by adults (soccer doesn't count)
- Play mimics what they would learn in school, but on their own terms

-The conspicuous difference in testing and its results in unschooling vs. traditional schooling...34:30

- Tests and essays begin to increase around the 6th grade
- Teachers need to stick to the schedule; teach to the test
- The emphasis is on accreditation/evaluation; but the journey to the destination is important
- It's not as difficult to prepare for the standardized tests as one might think

-Yes, unschoolers can go to college too!...41:20

- No benefits in year to year testing; ties students and parents to the local curriculum
- Appropriate to do a standardized test at age 18 for college entrance
- 13-year-olds can do 8 grades of math in one year because their brain is ready to understand abstract concepts
- A strong homeschool lobby can influence legislation and enforcement of local education laws

-Creative ways to satisfy governmental education requirements...44:30

- Unschooling is a methodology; many schools do unschooling within their schools
- Look for skills that can be learned in video games, journals, etc.

-The concept of "Block learning" and why learning something every day can do more harm than good...47:35

- If a child *doesn't want to do* a particular task, don't make them do it
- Turn what they do naturally and turn it into a "subject" they need to learn: math, science, etc.

-What a typical day of unschooling might look like...50:00

- It's relaxed
- Lots of family activities, such as nightly family dinner

-Success stories and research on the benefits of unschooling...55:00

- [Team of 30](#)
 - Survey of parents of unschooled children
 - All 30 of them got accepted into university
 - 1/3 in arts fields; 1/3 in humanities; 1/3 in STEM courses
 - 22 of the 30 have graduated from their programs
- [John Holt's website](#)
 - John coined the term "unschooling"
- Judy doesn't like the term because it sounds "anti-school"

-How unschooling compares with a Waldorf or Montessori method of learning...1:01:00

- They incorporate unschooling in their methodology without calling it that
- "What do you do if the child doesn't want to do that?" Is it coercive or not?
- Most government schools are coercive
- Much easier to unschool outside the school system
- Templates or set curriculums lead children to a preconceived outcome
- Kids are natural communicators and collaborators

-Why "time-honored" traditions like handwriting don't need to be emphasized in schooling today...1:06:05

- It takes 15 years to change a curriculum in a government school
- Instead learn coding, social media, blogging, youtube, etc.
- Life experiences, world travel can replicate what is taught in university

-Resources Judy recommends learning more on unschooling and free play...1:16:30

- [Books by Thomas Armstrong on Amazon](#)
- Book: [Free To Learn](#)(and [Peter Gray's other books on Amazon](#))
- [Hslda.org](#)

-And much more!

Resources from this episode:

-Book: [Unschooling To University - Relationships Matter Most In A World Crammed With Content](#)

-[John Holt's website](#)

-Book: [Free To Learn](#)(and [Peter Gray's other books on Amazon](#))

-[Books by Thomas Armstrong on Amazon](#)

-[Hslda.org](#)

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Do you have questions, thoughts or feedback for Judy or me? Leave your comments below and one of us will reply!