

Adulthood is not the same as doing adult things

Out of the Box



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WE ALL GREW up wanting to become an adult someday, assuming more powers and doing more “adult” things, but the process of actually becoming one seems to take much longer in today’s world.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article pointed out that a new made-up word – “adulthood” – is trending up among youngsters in the United States, which indicates that “to a growing number of Americans, acting like a grown-up seems like a kind of role-playing, a mode of behavior requiring humorous detachment.”

How the world has changed.

To combat the trend, the author of the article (who is a US senator and a former college president) listed five points of parenting which he saw would help turn our children into “formed, vivacious, appealing, resilient, self-reliant, problem-solving souls” (and which he applied to his own three children).

These are: 1) resist consumption and distinguish between “want” and “need”; 2) embrace the ethos of meaningful work, face the challenges and appreciate the rewards; 3) connect across generations to gain different perspectives; 4) travel meaningfully – focus on people, experience, adventure, and being out of one’s comfort zone; and 5) make reading a habit to become truly literate, “a prerequisite for freedom and self-government.”

I share many of the same thoughts with the author. I have always made teaching a sense of responsibility to my own children a priority.

My children should not have to be worried about whether they are following the footsteps of their parents or not; they should have an independent

mind of their own, and be responsible for their own actions. As a parent, my job is not to dictate what my children should do in their adult life.

I would be more than satisfied to see them growing into adults who have ambition, drive and work hard toward their goals. And it helps our children a long way when we lead by example, too.

What does adulthood mean? In Hong Kong, that would be getting a new ID card when one has reached 18 years old, but doing “adult things” does not equal to having an “adult” mind.

An example would be getting a driver’s license; we could apply for one after 18, but that does not mean that all drivers are responsible and mature ones. It takes further time for many to achieve maturity.

I often see youngsters who are ambitious do “adult” things so that they can prove to others that they have grown up, but the truth is it takes much more than that to be a real grown-up.

“Adulthood” is not equal to reaching adult age.

Why is it so important to assume adulthood?

For starters, a society will always need a steady influx of individuals who are responsible citizens and ready to contribute to society, in order to keep growing and sustain.

Our ancestors built the society we live in with their hard work: they built a platform where we can thrive and prosper, and we must do the same for the future generations to come.

This sense of responsibility and mission, I believe, is essential for our society to go forward.

So to ambitious young ones who are eager to become adults, my advice is: just be patient but also proactive. Your road will be full of challenges and choices, which will lead you to different paths.

And you shall learn, little by little, along the way on what it takes to become a responsible and mature member of this society.

As the author of the *WSJ* article said, “maturity requires imagining life without material wealth.”

Ultimately, what matters in your lives and careers will not be your technical skills or your degree.

Your view, your opinion, and who you are, will determine how far you go.