

A Conversation with  
**HEATHER SHUMAKER**  
Author of *It's OK to Go Up the Slide*

1. **How does this book expand upon your first release IT'S OK NOT TO SHARE?**

*It's OK to Go Up the Slide* naturally picks up where the first book left off. It expands into the early elementary school years as well as touching on topics for families with preschoolers and kindergarteners. The *Slide* book takes the Renegade Rules philosophy and applies it to new topics like princess play, talking to strangers, and going to school.

2. **You argue that modern kindergarten rarely offers what kindergarten-aged children really need. Why are our school systems changing at this level and why are children having a difficult time coping?**

The kids are the same as they've always been, but our cultural expectations have dramatically changed. Adults joke about the good old days, when kindergarteners used to have half days, nap times, and lots of singing and sandbox play. But the truth is most five-year-olds still need that. Kids crash and can't cope in kindergarten when adult expectations clash with what they need. Why such a push for early academics? It's a mix of fear and a business-model approach to education, one that believes that speeding things up is always better.

Kindergarteners have *so* much they're ready to learn. When we impose a suite of academic expectations on young kids before they're emotionally, socially and cognitively ready, that's miseducation. Kids deserve to thrive at age five.

3. **You note in *Rule 8: Ban Elementary Homework*, that the benefits of homework are age dependent. What is the case against homework at a young age and how can parents approach their child's elementary school teacher about opting out?**

Absolutely! That's the message: that homework can have benefits, but the benefits are age dependent. For elementary-aged children, there's no evidence that homework has an academic benefit. When school's out, young kids need plentiful time to play, sleep and be supported by their families so they can be ready for the next school day. Research consistently shows that homework in elementary school does have an impact, but the impact is negative: homework turns kids *off* school and learning.

How to broach the topic? With courage and confidence, and a willing, open heart to listen. The book is filled with ideas about how to change the role of homework in family life or fully opt out, but it all starts with questioning the homework norm. In other words, going up the slide.

4. **Your philosophy on education and parenting was influenced by your own experiences as a student at the unorthodox School for Young Children in Columbus, Ohio. Can you tell us a little bit about this school and its importance to you?**

Yes, the School for Young Children (SYC) is a renegade itself. For example, teachers provide boxing gloves and encourage children to engage in rough-and-tumble play in boxing games and wrestling matches. I went to school there as a 4- and 5-year-old, and my mother taught at SYC for 40 years. The philosophies at SYC are deeply rooted in child development and trust in the child. Children who come out of that program are unusually skilled in conflict mediation and coping with their emotions. It's a fantastic foundation for the years ahead.

I credit SYC for teaching my mother how to parent in a confident, respectful manner. I never had any complaints about the way I was raised, and that's largely due to the wealth of experience she gained at SYC. The goal of my books is to spread that knowledge to readers.

- 5. You explain that sometimes children go to extremes with gender roles when they're young. Should parents be worried about princess play, dress ups, or gender norms? What can children explore and learn through this type of play?**

When a girl gravitates to an all-pink wardrobe and fixates on princesses, parents often worry it's not healthy. The key is to separate princess play from princess pressure. It's perfectly natural for preschoolers and early elementary kids to gravitate to extremes for a while. One reason is that they're exploring gender identity. They're also exploring power. All that princess pink can be powerful, as long as it's coming from the child's imagination and isn't overly influenced by media. Dress-up play is excellent social play, full of creativity, negotiating skills and emotional learning.

- 6. You spend Section V of your book discussing how to help kids cope with sorrow, empathy, and disaster. Can you comment on this?**

These topics are tricky and we often avoid them – whether it's racial unfairness, sad endings in books, or shootings in the news – because they make us uncomfortable. What we need to keep in mind is this: if a child is old enough to ask, she's old enough to get an honest answer.

- 7. The guiding principle in your new book is "If something's bothering you, it's time to make a change." Can you provide examples of when parents should speak up and advocate for their child and why it's appropriate to buck the system as opposed to "just go along with it"?**

It's not comfortable to buck the system. As new parents we tend to think, "if everybody's doing it, it must be right." That attitude didn't work back in high school, and it doesn't work now. We have to think for ourselves and question practices that impact our kids. If you have a kindergartener who doesn't like school, or a second-grader who cries about doing homework, or a child who can't entertain herself without a screen, you know in your gut that something's wrong. Listen to that gut. Dive in and learn more about what's age-appropriate. You may not think of yourself as an advocate, but when it comes to supporting kids, we all need to be willing to go up the slide.

# # #

**IT'S OK TO GO UP THE SLIDE:**

**Renegade Rules for Raising Confident and Creative Kids**

By Heather Shumaker

TarcherPerigee paperback | \$16.00 | 978-0-399-17200-7 | on-sale March 8, 2016