

My name is Autumn Kintner. I am a 34 year old woman who lives in Columbus, Ohio. Although I am not a mother, I wish I was. There is nothing I want more in this world than to nurture another soul. To breathe life into it, to feed it, teach it, and watch it outgrow my wildest expectations. But I know this also comes with a bone-chilling fear of the things I don't have control over. I know a child is not just raised by their parents, but by the community they live in.

It didn't register with me when I was a kid, but looking back I recognize the fear my parents had about the effect the world at large would have on me. I don't even have my own child, but I have the same fear about my nephews and nieces, my friend's children, and my (hopefully) future children. With that in mind, I am so incredibly proud of my parents for instilling love and trust in me despite their fears. It's natural to respond to something that's outside of your control by tightening your grip on the few things you do have control over. You exercise control in your life where you can. But more than they wanted to control me, my parents wanted me to be my own person. They wanted me to be a good person. They wanted me to work my hardest every day, to love myself, and to show love to everyone around me. They were clear about their expectations, but they showed me nothing but love and trust. And once I could drive, I absolutely betrayed that trust- I stayed out late, I hung out in places and with people they wouldn't have approved of, and I did some of the most \*incredibly\* stupid things a kid can get up to. But I learned so much about myself and the world around me in those days that I could have never experienced or figured out had my parents known about it. And maybe it took me a little bit longer than it should have to learn my lesson. But I eventually grew to respect the expectations my parents had for me, and for the rules that I had rebelled against. Although I racked up a ton of physical and emotional scars from abusing that freedom, it showed me more about myself and the world around me than I had ever seen before. When I (finally) started taking responsibility for myself, I became the person I am today. And I would not be here to tell you this story if my life had played out any other way.

I can't wait to start a family. And the thing I look forward to most is the thing I know I will fear the most: letting go. Controlling a child into doing what you think is right for them is not the same as loving them. Shielding them from what you think are corrupting influences is not the same as nurturing them. Everyone has a right to privacy and to their own lives- no matter what age they are. Stop taking away children's ability to be themselves just because what they are choosing to do with it scares you. Even if you think they're being incredibly stupid, they aren't hurting themselves. They're exploring what it means to be a human. What it means to be the person they are. What it means to live. I'm begging you to just let kids be themselves.

Thank you.