



COMMON GROUND SPEAKER SERIES – 2018  
Carl Honoré  
SLOW PARENTING: Raising Children in a Fast World

Carl Honoré’s message is simple but counterintuitive: To triumph in a fast world, you have to slow down. Honoré is an award-winning writer, broadcaster and TED speaker. As the global guru on the Slow Movement, he travels the world to teach individuals and organizations how to power forward by slowing down. He spoke to Common Ground audiences in October 2018.

Honoré’s ‘ah-ha’ moment came during his son’s bedtime. Honoré found himself once again rushing through story time. He was skipping paragraphs and turning multiple pages at a time. He started flirting with the idea of creating a 1-minute bedtime story when he stopped himself. ‘Am I really in such a hurry that I’m okay with fobbing off my little boy in exchange for speed?’ he asked. From this question, the Slow Parenting Movement was born.

The Slow Movement is not about doing everything slowly. Slow with a capital S is about doing things at the right speed – mindfully. It is about doing one thing at a time, as *well* as possible rather than as *fast* as possible. It is about striking the right balance between fast and slow. Mastering that balance results in better health as well as more pleasure and meaning to your life. It can also make you more efficient, creative and productive. *The Economist* magazine recently concluded: “Forget frantic acceleration. Mastering the clock of business is about choosing when to be fast and when to be slow.”

Honoré is the author of three books. His first, *Praise of Slow* examines our compulsion to hurry and chronicles a global trend toward putting on the brakes. Book two, *Under Pressure*, explores the good, the bad and the ugly of modern childrearing – and offers a blueprint for change. The latest book, *The Slow Fix*, explores how to tackle complex problems in every walk of life, from health and relationships to business and politics, without falling for superficial, short-term quick fixes.

According to Honoré, childhood has become a cross between a competitive sport and an assembly line – a type of race to perfection. A noble parental instinct fuels this race. Parents want the best for their kids whether in the form of multiple tutors or rides to various competitive sporting practices. Given the amount of money we spend on our children, jokes Honoré, they should be the most well-adjusted and happy generation of children ever. Ironically, and sadly, the reverse is true. Children today appear to lack self-control and resilience, childhood mental health issues are at crisis levels, and first-year students in college are falling apart in record numbers. The current parental paradigm seems to be failing our children.



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Children do need pressure, stress and structure. However, they need it in the right doses. Children need the time and space to explore the world – they need time to fail and to get bored. Nowadays, Honoré states, parents feel like it is their fault if their kids are bored. Parents need to find the balance between leaning in and backing off. Parenting with a Slow spirit means listening to your children and then waiting for the right time to give perspective. Let the child get their curiosity going and then meet them at the end of the road when they need an adult's wisdom and guidance.

Honoré is a fan of technology. However, he is also a fan of limits on technology. In his Australian television show, *Frantic Family Rescue*, he introduces a Gadget Box. All the family's gadgets go inside it for an entire month. At the end of the month, the gadgets come out. Every time, he sees families go back to using them with more balance. Families set specific times of the week when all screens are off, and designate specific outings as permanently screen-free. Honoré believes that young people themselves are starting to ask themselves about their overuse of technology. Children are setting limits upon themselves. There is a new phone app that rewards people for spending time offline. 'Stacking' is a game in which kids all put their phones in a pile on the table at a restaurant. The first person to reach for their phone must pay the bill.

Another big part of Slowing down is saying NO. Both to our children and to ourselves. Modern parents do not want to be too tough on their overwhelmed children. However, children need to hear the word NO. Children need to learn to do fewer things and take more pleasure in them. Moreover, children need to see their parents Slowing down and saying NO themselves.

The Slow Movement is reaching college campuses. Harvard sent out a letter to all incoming freshmen entitled, "Slow Down." Now that you're here, the letter stated, you need to avoid being over-scheduled. You have been doing so much for your entire life, now that you are away from home, it is time to do fewer things. 'What matters is that you come to understand what you want; the challenge is to give yourself enough breathing room to discover your own loves and how to pursue them, your own ambitions and how to achieve them.'

Honoré summed up his talk with his **Three Pillars of Slow Parenting:**

1. Raising a child is not a competitive sport. You are not developing a product; you are raising a human being. Look at parenting as a journey. Instead of dragging our children where we believe they need to go, we need to allow them time and room for discovery.
2. Less is more – less structure, less technology, less consumption.
3. There is no universal formula for raising a child – every child is unique, and every family has its own dynamic. Stop and ask yourself, ‘What kind of childhood do I want my children to have?’ and ‘What kind of parent do I want to be?’

But can it be done? Honoré asked at the end of his talk. Is it possible? Can children afford to slow down? Will they be run over? He believes that the entire world is beginning to see the adverse effects of our sped-up lifestyle. In Singapore, the Prime Minister recently wrote: ‘Please let your children have their childhood – instead of growing up balanced and happy, the over-pressured child grows up narrow and neurotic. No homework is not a bad thing. It’s good for young children to play, and to learn through play.’

He reflects on the change Slow parenting has wrought in his own family. He now views bedtime stories as the reward at the end of the day. It became a connection time with his children. He encourages every parent in the room to embrace their inner tortoise and Slow down.