

But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids

[What Is It Like To Be An Adult?](#)

December 21, 2018

[00:00:21] This is *But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids* from Vermont Public Radio.

[00:00:26] I'm Jane Lindholm. I host the show. Melody Bodette and I make it, and it's our job to take your amazing questions that you send us and find you some answers.

[00:00:36] We are interested in whatever you all are interested in: science, history, art, music. We love all of your questions and all of you. Hey, by the way, as we wrap up 2018, I thought it might be fun for you to know that we have gotten more than 3000 questions from you since we started this show in 2016. You've downloaded episodes several million times and we have heard from kids in 47 countries all over the world and 49 U.S. states. How cool is that? If you're a kid listening in South Dakota or if you know any curious kids who live in South Dakota and might want to give this show a listen and send in a question, tell them about *But Why*. That is the only state we're missing. Today, we're answering a question that doesn't really fit a category.

[00:01:30] [Child] I'm Blake I'm nine years old. I'm from Edmonds, Washington. And I want to know, what is it like to be an adult?

[00:01:36] [Jane] One of the things we love about this question, Blake, is that there isn't one right or definitive answer. If you asked every adult you know that question, you'd get a different answer from each of them. You could even ask the same adult that question two days in a row and they might give you different answers. How they answer might depend on their mood or what's going on in their life. And it can also depend on how old they are. So, we thought it would be fun to ask some of the adults who listen to "But why?" to send in some answers. Here's what two younger adults sent us.

[00:02:09] [Young adult, female] My name is Emma. I'm from Burlington, Vermont. And I am 23 years old. Being an adult is like being a kid, but doing adult things. I don't feel like an adult all the time. I usually feel like someone who isn't an adult yet, but has to do adult things anyway.

[00:02:29] [Young adult, female] My name is Jess. I am originally from Westford, Vermont. I am now living in Portland, Oregon, however. And I am almost 24 years old. When I was growing up, I always felt older than my peers. I always felt like I had things kind of figured out.

[00:02:43] And now, having lived on my own for six years now, it's kind of crazy to have to have to take care of yourself and really feel the young-ness of how you live. and struggling to take care of yourself. Though, it's in those moments of struggle that you really don't feel like you have it figured out. And I'm sure, as I get this whole adult thing down, it'll get a lot easier. But one of the biggest parts of feeling like an adult is feeling so out of your depth. But it's also a lot of fun. I mean, you can also choose everything for yourself.

[00:03:23] You're more independent than you've ever been. I got an apartment that had a balcony for the first time and it made me feel like a winner. Being able to cook for yourself, suddenly getting to explore all the foods that you didn't really get to explore when you're a child, and getting to dress however you want, and getting to buy whatever you want to buy

as long as you got the money for it. One of the big lessons is definitely when you realize that you don't have the money for it and you need to make some money for it or else you don't get what you want, because that's what being an adult is. But it feels to me, at least, like I've never been younger. But I also have never had more childlike wonder in the world because I get to experience so much more of it.

[00:04:13] [Jane] We also gave Blake's question to someone else.

[00:04:16] [Nora McInerney] My name is Nora McInerney. I am a writer and I host a podcast called "Terrible, Thanks for Asking" which is more for grownups. My show asks people how they are and wants them to be honest when they answer. It's kind of a strange thing, but a lot of grownups tend to lie and say we're fine when we aren't. So, my podcast talks to people about the hardest thing that they've ever gone through, or just a difficult situation someone is experiencing. And we just listen to it. If that sounds like a bummer, you might be a child. *[laughter]*

[00:04:58] [Jane] Well, I thought you'd be perfect to join us for this episode because one of the things that you do in your show is talk about how things can be really hard and sometimes really sad, but also where people find joy and laughter and funny moments, Even when things feel really bad, they can also feel really funny. And I know kids feel that way, too, but so do adults. So, it's a really good way, I think, to have you along with us to talk about how all of those feelings can live inside you at one time.

[00:05:28] [Nora] Yeah. They do. They just do. They just do all the time and that is what I remember about being a child—was just this chaos that I felt all the time. Honestly, childhood was really confusing for me and I felt like I had all these feelings and I didn't hear anybody else talking about them. And so, they felt like maybe I shouldn't be having them. And I guess I kind of carried that into adulthood. I thought things were either always good or always bad. And I guess I've learned that mostly things are just a mix of different feelings all at once.

[00:06:05] [Jane] Well, that gets us to what Blake asked us.

[Blake} "I want to know, what is it like to be an adult?"

[Nora] What it's like being an adult. As a kid, I thought adulthood seemed incredibly bad and stressful and confusing and hard.

[00:06:20] And I remember being very worried that I wouldn't know how to buy a car or a house or what kind of furniture to get or how to pay a bill.

[00:06:30] And I don't know any of those things and I had to learn them all very quickly. Being an adult is just like being a kid only you're the one who's responsible. So, dude, stay a kid as long as you can.

[00:06:49] [Jane] Now, as a kid, you may hear that a lot from adults. "Stay a kid as long as you can." That can be really frustrating to hear, especially if you feel like you don't want to go to school, or do your chores, or have people tell you what to do, or do the things that you have to do as a kid. Also, it's not like you have a choice in terms of stopping time or, you know, staying a kid or being an adult. So, what does that even mean? But if you hear people say it and think, "Why would I want to be a kid? Adults get to do everything they want." It's not actually like that for grownups.

[00:07:21] [Nora] Being a grownup and especially being a grownup who has kids, it's actually kind of confusing for me sometimes because my kids will ask me things like, "why are you asking *me* that?" And then I realize, oh, I'm the grown up. Like they think I know this. They think I know things.

[00:07:42] And you don't necessarily know things just because you're a grownup. So, the things that are the same are that you still have a lot of feelings. You're still learning things, by the way. I was like, I can't wait to be done with school and never learn another... False! Your whole life, you're going to be learning things. You're going to have to do group projects. That's called going to work. You're going to have homework. It's called your work. You're going to have an allowance. It's called your salary. The thing is, as an adult, I *can* eat a box of Lucky Charms for dinner. No one can stop me. No one can stop me. Also, no one can stop me from doing something like eating a whole box of Lucky Charms for dinner and then feeling awful because that's too many Lucky Charms; that's too much sugar for a person. That's why your parents are saying "no" to you. Not just because they're mean, but because they're mean and they don't want your stuffing to hurt.

[00:08:44] [Jane] But don't you think that's one of the hardest things, is that when you're an adult, you don't have another adult, usually, telling you, "No, that's not a good idea." So, you have to make the decisions that you don't want to make or that don't feel like the right short-term decisions, but are probably the right long-term decisions. And that's hard when you have to be the one making all of those choices.

[00:09:06] [Nora] Yeah. You have to be the mean one to yourself.

[00:09:10] [Jane] So, sometimes being a grownup is hard. We like to think that grownups have all the freedom to do the things they want to do, but often they have to consider the outcome of those choices. They might have to consider how their choices affect people around them, including their own kids. Here's how a few other people frame it.

[00:09:28] [adult, male] Hi, my name's Tom. I live in Brighton, England. And I'm very nearly 40 years old. It's hard work, but a lot of fun. Even though I have to go to work every day to make money, I get to come home to my lovely family and my kids, and we get to do loads of fun stuff and I get to be the one who decides what I do with my life. And that's really, really cool.

[00:10:04] [adult, female] My name is Reem, I'm 33 years old, and I live in Atlanta, Georgia.

[00:10:10] [*baby babbles in background*] Being a grownup is not as fun as I thought it would be. When I was a little girl, I couldn't wait to be a grownup. I thought grownups got to have the most fun. Grownups got to sleep late. Grownups got to drink soda all the time. Grownups didn't have to go to school.

[00:10:27] But now that I'm a grownup, I miss going to school because work is hard. And I actually want to go to sleep, but I can't because my children are so messy and I have to clean the house. So being a kid is much more fun. They mean I've grown up and I cannot be a kid again, but I wish that I could some days. Thank you *But Why*.

[00:10:47] [Jane] So Nora, we also put this out on Twitter. And Twitter is a social media Web site for adults, but we thought we could get some adults to share some thoughts. And

Zach says, "Being an adult is like recess ended for good. Stay young, dog." [laughter] So, there's that.

Matt says, "More menu choices. No need for pizza, mac and cheese, or chicken fingers while everybody else eats the really cool stuff. But the haters harsh your mellow if you stay in your pajamas for a full Saturday." [Nora] True. [Jane] Yeah.

And Brent said, "It is fun, but can be really hard at times. Mostly when it comes to paying bills. We can't just go and buy all the cool things we want just because we have the money. We have to be selective. Everybody's experiences are different, just like being a kid." What do you think?

[00:11:30] [Nora] It really just depends on who you ask and what kind of a day they're having, right? Like, my five-year-old, yesterday, was in the car with my husband and said, "What day is it today?" My husband said "Monday". And Ralph said, "Ah, it's the best Monday of my life." Previously, the night before, he had said that he had the worst day of his life. And the worst day of his life was that we had waffles. He wore his pajamas all day long.

[00:11:58] We watched two movies. He ate two cookies. What more do you want out of a day? Like, what would make you happy, child? And same with me. If you'd have asked me yesterday, I would mean like being an adult is the worst thing ever. If you can, be a dog instead. And today I'm like, you know, it's pretty cool.

[00:12:21] [Jane] As I said, asking what being an adult is like is almost like saying, how's your day going? It depends on the day. Ultimately, adults might seem kind of different than kids, but really, we have a lot of the same feelings.

[00:12:35] [Adult female] My name is Kimble and I live in Lehi, Utah. Oh, what is it like to be an adult? There's a lot of great things about being an adult.

[00:12:44] It's fun to be able to really do whatever you want, except sometimes it can be hard trying to figure out what the best things are. And sometimes, I'm a mom right now. Sometimes it's actually really hard being a mom, but it's also really fun to see my kids grow and learn. And it reminds me that I should keep learning, too. And I find that, when I am learning, that I feel like a better adult, that I am more interesting and I like being an adult more when I'm learning things.

[00:13:25] [Adult, male] My name is Ayres and I'm a grownup from Kitchener-Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, and being an adult is actually pretty great. When I was a kid, I kept wanting to be a grownup and I didn't love school very much. And for me, growing up, becoming a grownup was really fun. And now I get to drive and I have a job and I have my own kids and a wife and a family. And when I was a kid, all this seemed to be very far away. But it's here. I did get there. And it's really fun. Actually, it is as fun as I thought it would be when I was a kid. So definitely worth it.

[00:14:06] Coming up, more questions for grownups.

[00:14:09] [child, male] What happens if you don't listen to your boss?

[00:14:13] [child, female] Why can adults do things that kids cannot do?

[00:14:19] This is *But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids?* I'm Jane Lindholm. Today, we're considering the somewhat mysterious world of adults. They drive cars. They pay bills. They don't have to go to school. Well, most of them, anyway. What's that like?

[00:14:33] [Adult, female] Hi, my name is Leah. I live in Alstead, New Hampshire and I'm 34 years old. I still feel like a kid.

[00:14:41] I like to have fun and play games with my friends. I like digging in dirt, planting the seeds, and watching plants grow. I like reading. I like drawing. I like playing with paint. And sometimes I make messes.

[00:14:54] But I have to do all of the chores, even the ones that aren't on the chore list.

[00:14:59] [Jane] Joining us on our journey into the adult universe today is Nora McInerney. She has a podcast for adults called *Terrible, Thanks for Asking*. It started when she had to go through some pretty tough stuff in her life and she interviews people about how they get through that. So, we thought she would be a good person to talk to because she's honest, and she says what she feels, and she's been through stuff. So, you know, there's more to adulthood than just looking forward to a blissful life. Challenges in childhood and challenges in adulthood. Now, in addition to Blake's question about what it's like to be an adult, we had some particular areas that were head scratchers about adulthood that other kids are wondering about. Here's one from Zinnia.

[00:15:45] [Child] "I'm four years old. I live in Bismarck, North Dakota. And my question is: what happens if you don't listen to your boss?"

[00:15:54] [Jane] So what happens if you don't listen to your boss?

[00:15:59] [Nora] OK, Zinnia, here's what happens when you don't listen to your boss. Sometimes nothing.

[00:16:06] And sometimes it's not that different from what happens when you don't listen to the grownups in your life. So, if you're not listening to your preschool teacher or you're not listening to your mom, and they have to talk to you about their expectations for you and what you agreed upon and then how you can meet those expectations, and that might be a talking-to for you and for us.

[00:16:30] It's called a review. And then sometimes maybe you'll be asked to leave work for a little bit, like a time out.

[00:16:38] And then, sometimes you're asked to leave work forever. Which is more like—I don't think that there is a four-year-old equivalent, but you just don't go back. Which means then you don't get any money.

[00:16:52] [Jane] And if you're not getting any money, you'll likely need to find a new job. Zinnia, the truth is some adults really love their jobs and their bosses, but that's not always the case. Those of you who are in school and have maybe had different teachers, this might be a little bit familiar. Perhaps you hit it off with your second-grade teacher, but your third-grade teacher isn't your favorite. It's a lot like that with bosses. Sometimes you have a great one and sometimes you don't. And even if you have a great one, you're not going to agree all the time. Learning to manage those relationships is challenging, and that's one of the things that growing up is all about, learning to navigate tricky situations.

[00:17:31] [Child, female] Hi, my name is Aria. I am seven. I live in Melbourne, Australia. My question is: why can adults do things that kids cannot do?

[00:17:45] [Jane] So, you know, we've talked about this. Adults get to do things. They make their own decisions. But why? Why do adults get to do that and kids don't?

[00:17:52] [Nora] Two things: money and power. You know, truly, a lot of decisions get made by adults because one, yes, our brains are more developed. Two, we're taller. Three, in most cases stronger. But really, like, we have the money. We have the money, we have all the power, we've all the power, basically, any situation.

[00:18:18] But guess what, little question-asker, adults don't get to do whatever they want because most of their decisions are dictated by the world around them, which is mostly controlled by other adults. So, every day grownups that you know go to jobs that they don't like, and pay bills that they don't want to pay, and go to meetings they don't want to go to, have dinner with friends they don't even like. There are so many grownups doing things that they don't want to do.

[00:18:47] And then, also, sometimes going to see a movie on a Monday, which is something you don't get to do because you're in school.

[00:18:58] [Jane] Unless your parent says, OK, we're going to go see a movie, but then that's still the adult making the decision.

[00:18:59] [Nora] It's still the adult making the decision. So yeah, I recognize that as a central frustration of childhood is that you really don't get to make any decisions.

[Jane] Yeah, and it doesn't always feel good.

[00:19:16] [Nora] but it doesn't feel good. And then sometime, when you're older, child, you will look back and be like, "I'm so overwhelmed. I wish someone would tell me what to eat, what to wear...

[Jane] what to do with my life,

[Nora] ...and where to be and what to do with my life."

[00:19:30] [Jane] Okay. Maybe we are oversimplifying things a little bit here. There are some things that kids don't get to decide. You do have to go to school or do your homeschooling. You probably don't get to decide what's for dinner every night. And adults will often say you have to do things that either keep you safe or keep the household running. If they're saying you have to get on your boots, it's because this is the routine you're going through. You have to get some place so that the whole household can function.

But if you're feeling like you don't get to make any decisions, you should talk to your adults about that, because maybe there are some decisions that your adults will let you make or let you be part of helping to make. And, while adults do have a lot of decisions to make and a lot of power over young people, most adults actually don't make decisions just on their own. They talk to the people they trust to help them decide things like, should I change my job? Should I buy this car? Even things like, what should I make for dinner?

Like, for example, I might want to eat a spicy seared tuna with cilantro and avocado and a soy glaze. My mouth is watering just thinking about it, but I won't make that because no one else in my house will eat it. So, I'll make something they will eat instead, and I might even ask them what they want.

[00:20:49] Here's a question from Lois.

[Child, female] I'm from Little Rock, Arkansas, and I'm 9 years old. And my question is: why do adults not play pretend like they used to do when they were kids?

[00:20:59] [Jane] Yeah. Why don't we play a pretend? I mean, some of us do.

[00:21:01] [Nora] We just get too consumed with the things that we have to do. And then I... OK ... Actually, do you want to know the truth, Lois? I feel like our brains shut down. I feel like the most brilliant and sparkly you will ever be is when you're a kid, and that's when your brain is at its peak. And your brain can do those things because it's so stretchy and squishy and filled with glitter. And you can just make something up and have fun with your friends playing with, like, nothing. And then, when you're grown up, you're just boring. But some people do. Some people still play games and have fun. And, then... But it's not the same. I know what you mean. It's not like an adult will just sit down with a -- like my toddler will sit down with a paper towel roll. And then he'll pick it up. It will be, you know, something else. He'll be spying on us from around the corner. Grownups don't do that.

[00:22:08] [Jane] And what Nora is talking about, that playful feeling of childhood, that's often something that adults kind of wish they could get back to. You know, when we heard earlier that adults will say, "don't grow up too quickly" or "stay a kid as long as you can," sometimes that's what they wish they could hold on to—that creative, carefree feeling of childhood. We know not all of childhood is carefree or exciting. There are a lot of you going through challenges. Some really, really hard things in your lives. And childhood is not always fun and games. So, childhood and adulthood are very similar in that way. You often have very strong feelings. There are things that you go through and that's when you lean on the people who care about you and who you trust to help you get through them. Here's one more question before we go.

[00:22:57] [Child, female] My name is Freya. I'm 6 years old. I live in Houston. My question is: why do people cry when they're happy?

[00:23:09] [Jane] So everybody thinks crying is for when you're sad. But a lot of adults seem to cry when they watch something beautiful or see an advertisement on TV that somehow makes them cry. And they say, "I'm crying because I'm happy." What is that all about?

[00:23:23] [Nora] So, you know, sometimes it feels like all of your feelings are tangled up inside of you, like just like a big knot of strings and necklaces and shoelaces. Or at least that's how it feels for me. I feel like tears, especially happy ones, are just like the feeling of all those feelings at once. And they just got to leak out of your eyes. It's better than your mouth.

[00:23:53] [Jane] I think for me, too, when I was a kid, I felt everything strongly, every emotion was strong. Every fight with a friend felt like a disaster. And as an adult, I don't know whether it's that all of those edges have been smoothed off. Or maybe I'm trying not to feel things and then something makes me feel something big. And, I don't know, the

emotion that comes out is crying instead of just a smile. It's like suddenly that emotion feels so big and your body doesn't quite know how to handle it in some way.

[00:24:22] [Nora] Yeah, that is probably it. Like we, generally as an adult, all of your feelings are more muted.

[00:24:31] Let me play you one more thought here. And this comes from Chris, who has thought a lot about what it feels like to be an adult.

[00:24:37] [Adult, male] I'm 46 years old from Thetford Center, Vermont. When my father passed away, I realized that there no longer was anyone standing behind me waiting to catch me if I fell. Instead, I became that last person, the person whose job it is to catch those loved ones standing before me, who fall. Being an adult is proudly standing in that line.

[00:24:59] [Jane] You know, one of the things about being an adult is you do feel responsible for the people who are younger than you. And if you have kids, you feel responsible for them. And if you don't have kids, you feel responsible for other kids and for the world. What does that feel like as an adult to have that responsibility?

[00:25:18] [Nora] A little befuddling if you're like me, really. Some days it feels really wonderful. Yeah, it feels really wonderful to be able to help somebody that you love through something, and if you can't help them through it, to just be there and let them know that you're there for them. And some days it's terrifying. And you think this is way too much? How on earth did generations of people before me do this.

[00:25:51] And I think the best is it's just like contentment. You're just like, oh, this is my life. Like this is what it's all about.

[00:25:58] [Jane] Do you have advice for kids who are looking at adults and feeling that befuddlement now? Like, I don't even know how I get to that point. Or I don't understand this species called adults and parents. Are there things that you wish you had known when you were a kid that, now that you are an adult, would have helped to bridge that divide or become an adult yourself?

[00:26:22] [Nora] It's hard to see grownups as people. It's hard because at least when I was young, it's not as if our parents were like, oh, let me deeply explain all of my decision-making. Yeah. Like they're just there. That just wasn't a thing. But I always asked a lot of questions and it's not as if I got answers to all of my questions from my parents. But I asked a lot of questions. But I it was hard for me to really tell my family how I felt. And part of it was I just didn't have the vocabulary for it. But most grownups do want to know and they don't want to hear like, "This is the worst day of my life. You're the worst." But they want to know when something is going on in your life that feels hard or when you feel scared. And I think sometimes as a kid, you sometimes feel like almost responsible for the happiness of the grownups around you. Like, well, I don't want to say this or my mom will be worried or I don't want my grandma to feel bad. But they want to know because they can't do anything about the things that they don't know about.

[00:27:35] [Jane] So, please talk to the adults about the things you're feeling. It can be hard if you don't know how to explain what's bothering you, but do try. Your adults want to help you become healthy, happy grownups. And you should know they are still working every day at becoming happy, healthy grownups themselves.

That's it for today. "But why" is produced by Melody Bodette and me, Jane Lindholm, at Vermont Public Radio. Our theme music is by Luke Reynolds. We had additional music today from Ketsa. This is our last episode of 2018. We're really looking forward to new episodes, more questions from you and a lot of fun in 2019. What are you looking forward to in the new year? Thank you for sharing your curiosity with us. No matter how old we are, we could all use more curiosity, more wonder and more understanding. By sharing your questions, your thoughts with us, and your ears by listening, you are helping to bring more of that to our world. So, thank you. And if you have a new question to ask us, don't forget you can have an adult record you telling us what your question is? Be sure to include your first name, where you live and how old you are and have your adult send the audio file to questions@ButWhyKids.org. We'll be back in two weeks with an all new episode. Until then, stay curious.