

## Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

# Are you a Helicopter Parent?



BY KIM DeMARCHI

We've heard all sorts of terms for parenting such as: autocratic, permissive, democratic, conscious, authoritative, minimalist, free range, attachment, and the list goes on! There is one that has actually been around since the late 1960's, became popular in the 1990's and later became popular enough that in 2011 it became a dictionary entry - Helicopter Parenting. Similar terms include lawnmower parenting and bulldoze parenting. Nonetheless, it is a style of child rearing in which an overprotective mother or father discourage a child's independence by being too involved in the child's life. In the typical helicopter parenting, a parent will "hover" nearby and "swoop" in at any sign of challenge or discomfort, much like a helicopter might hover and swoop in for a rescue.

Helicopter parenting can occur at any age. In toddlerhood, a helicopter parent might constantly shadow, stay with, and direct their child's every move. In elementary school, the helicopter parent makes sure their child has a certain teacher or coach, basically selects the friends and activities, and provides too much assistance in homework

and projects. In college, the helicopter parent is still choosing the class schedule, managing their appointments, and calling a professor about a bad grade. Now with all the technology at parent's fingertips, they aren't just swooping in physically, but hovering constantly via the smart phone. Many parents are in constant contact through cell phones, tracking their grades online, and literally tracking their every move with smartphone apps.

No one sets out to become a helicopter parent. Parenting is THE most difficult job in the world, and sometimes it's easy to obsess about on occasion. Helicopter parenting can develop for several reasons, most centered on fear. Parents fear that not being completely involved in their children's lives, may affect their children negatively. Some parents, who felt neglected or ignored in their own childhood, may overcompensate by paying excessive attention to their own children now. Parents worry, some more than others. Worrying

too much can push parents to take control over their children's life to try and protect them from a bad grade, not making the team, not being invited to a party, etc... Parents can now investigate every illness, child predator, virtually anything bad that can happen to children with the crazy accessibility of the Internet. Parents want to protect their children from ever being hurt or disappointed and this fear begins to govern their parenting.

Parents love their children and start off with great intentions. They want to be involved and engaged to help a child feel loved, safe, confident, and supported.

Initially, when parents micromanage their child's every moment, there are good outcomes. But somewhere along the line, it becomes overparenting and can actually affect your child adversely through terrible long term costs. The "over" part of overparenting is a reference to excessive levels of involvement, control, and problem solving on a child's behalf. Over involvement can communicate to a child that they aren't trusted. Always being there to

clean up the mistakes or prevent a problem makes a child feel incompetent. How does a child ever learn to deal with disappointment if the parent always ensures success? If a child has a parent that does everything for him, how does he develop mastery of lifelong skills? The surest way to make life hard for your child is to make it too easy.

Parents have an extremely difficult job of finding the delicate balance of getting them from child to adult. How can parents protect their children from real danger, but also allow some suffering. Children need to be disappointed, struggle, and have the occasional failure. It teaches them to work through it and persevere, and in the end, to become reliant, self confident children and adults. Our real job as parents is to put ourselves out of a job. We love our children fiercely, and the most loving thing we can do for them is to prepare them for adulthood. Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.

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