

HELICOPTER PARENTING

The term 'helicopter parent' was first used in Dr. Haim Ginott's 1969 book, *Between Parent and Teenager*, by teens who said that their parents would "hover" over them "like a helicopter". The term became popular enough to become a dictionary entry in 2011. Similar terms include 'lawnmower parenting', 'cosseting parent' and 'bulldoze parenting'. Helicopter parenting refers to parents who become overly involved in their children's lives, especially when it comes to education. These parents typically take too much responsibility for their children's experiences and, more specifically, their successes or failures. Adults who display a helicopter parenting style are likely to become involved in a child's life in a way that is over-controlling, over-protective and over-perfecting. This level of parental involvement is often not age-appropriate, and is in excess of that which is required for responsible parenting¹.

Why do Parents 'Hover'?

A helicopter parenting style can develop for a number of reasons. Four common factors which contribute to this particular style of parenting include: 1. *The fear of dire consequences*: A low grade, not making the team or not getting a certain job can appear disastrous to a parent, especially if it seems as though the situation could have been avoided through increased parental involvement. Many of the consequences which parents are trying to prevent are however good learning experiences for children, which help them to understand the natural consequences of their actions and assist them in the development of resilience. 2. *Feelings of anxiety*: Concern about the economy, the job market and the world in general can push parents toward taking more control over their child's life, in an attempt to protect their children from ever being hurt or disappointed. 3. *Overcompensation*: Adults who felt unloved, neglected or ignored as children often overcompensate with their own children. Excessive attention and monitoring may be an attempt to rectify a deficiency that the parents felt in their own upbringing. 4. *Peer pressure from other parents*: When parents see other over-involved parents it can trigger a similar response. Parents may feel that they are not doing enough for their child, in comparison to other parents, and increase their level of involvement in order to reduce a sense of guilt.

Whilst helicopter parenting styles are common, and often more appropriate, among young children in play school and/or preschool, they can also be witnessed among children in the later years of primary school, in high school and even at a tertiary or university level. The practice of over-parenting can prove to be somewhat embarrassing, especially for children and teens who are desperate to establish their own identity and independence by breaking away from their families.

Potential Problems with Helicopter Parenting:

A helicopter parenting style may result in a combination of the following consequences for children: 1. A lack of problem solving skills (as helicopter parents would typically step in to solve problems on their child's behalf). 2. Feelings of dependence rather than independence (Helicopter parents do so much for their children that it can make their children dependent upon them. If a mother wakes her 10 year old daughter up each morning, in order to ensure that she is ready on time, her daughter won't learn how to do this for herself. Parents should be helping children to learn how to survive without them). 3. A lack of assertiveness (It is important for children to be able to ask questions, gain clarification and speak up when they need something. In the workforce, these children won't have Mom or Dad available to help them deal with a mean boss or challenging policy at the office). 4. Shielding from natural consequences (If a child over sleeps or does not complete their homework, it is healthy for them to experience natural consequences for their actions- such as getting in to trouble with their teacher, which will encourage them to be more accountable in future). 5. A strained parent-child relationship (constant nagging and checking up on a child's every move is unlikely to make a child want to talk to their parents more, instead, it may push them away. A healthy relationship should encourage children to talk to their parents about problems, as needed. A helicopter parenting style may lead to children keeping more secrets, as they attempt to maintain some sense of privacy²).

For a list of references and links to more information on this topic please visit <http://www.christinedarney.co.za/Psych-Ed/psych-ed.html>.

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