

Q&A:

Reconciling Helicopter Parenting

Helicopter parenting is a dilemma for school districts. School administrators and teachers strive to nurture strong school-family ties, but for helicopter parents those ties are too tight.

This Q&A offers salient ways school boards can redirect the over-involvement of helicopter parents into productive and healthy school interactions.

Q: How can I tell the difference between an engaged parent and a helicopter parent?

A: Helicopter parents are overly involved in their kids' lives, including their schooling. A 2015 article by Harvard Health Publishing says these parents help their kids with school projects, advocate for high grades and regularly drive to school during the day with forgotten items.

Helicopter parents fight their children's battles for them, thereby robbing their children of a necessary requisite to adulthood – facing life's challenges on their own. Conversely, engaged parents support their children from the sidelines and don't cater to their children's every whim.

Q: What leads to helicopter parenting?

A: Helicopter parenting mainly stems from fear, says former dean at Stanford University, Julie Lythcott-Haims, in a 2015 NPR article. She explains that a parent's anxiety about their child's success can also lead to more controlling and overprotective behaviors. In addition, helicopter parents can create helicopter parents. This coddling behavior by one parent can pressure others into feeling obligated to do the same, notes a 2015 University of Utah Health blog.

Q: How does helicopter parenting affect children?

A: Due to their parents' meddling and social networks, children of helicopter parents may get high grades, get into the college of their choice and procure their dream job. However, research on the long-term outcomes of these children as they become adults highlights the possible negative consequences of such parenting:

- Inability to cope with life and problem-solve for themselves¹
- A greater risk of anxiety and depression. In addition, these children may have poor self-esteem and feel entitled to things²
- Inability to self-regulate emotions³

Q: How can school administrators and teachers help helicopter parents relinquish control?

- A:**
- Listen to these parents and ask open-ended inquiries. Consider these parents for classroom helpers.⁴
 - Mirror the parents' feelings back to them to show you are listening. These parents favor in-person and regularly scheduled meetings.⁵

Q: What are strategies to curb helicopter parenting?

- A:**
- Strategies include:
- Institute a "no rescue policy," which makes children accountable for their actions and learn responsibility. For example, if children repeatedly forget things at home during school days, discourage parents from driving to school to bring those items.⁶
 - Allow age-appropriate youth to be their own school advocates and let children experience the normative ups and downs of life to prepare them for their futures, says Lythcott-Haims.
 - Help children work through tough emotions via relaxing techniques like deep breathing or finding a quiet sanctuary, according to the American Psychological Association.

Conclusion

Acknowledging and reconciling the behavior of helicopter parents within a school-family engagement model should not be a taboo subject for school district personnel. By offering tangible ways to both understand this overprotective behavior on the part of parents and the reasons for it, school personnel can work toward having mutually beneficial lines of communication between schools and families – and ensure healthy and productive student development.



Resources and Footnotes

¹ Scarsdale Public Schools. Heathcote Elementary School. Helicopter Parenting. April 2008. www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/Page/6243.

² Harvard Health Publishing. Helicopter Parenting: When Too Much Help Is No Help. Harvard Medical School. July 2015. www.health.harvard.edu/parenting-issues/helicopter-parenting-when-too-much-help-is-no-help.

³ American Psychological Association. Helicopter Parenting May Negatively Affect Children's Emotional Well-Being, Behavior. June 18, 2018. www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/06/helicopter-parenting.aspx.

⁴ Hiltz, Julie. Helicopter parents can be a good thing. Phi Delta Kappan. September 27, 2017. www.kappanonline.org/helicopter-parents-can-good-thing/.

⁵ Fagell, Phyllis L. Reining In Helicopter Parents. May 30, 2017. www.kappanonline.org/helicopter-parents/.

⁶ Horn, Jordana. The 'No Rescue Movement': Could This Be The Cure for Helicopter Parenting? Today. October 23, 2014. www.today.com/parents/no-rescue-parenting-anti-helicopter-2D80204421.