

Helicopter Parents Should Be Prepared For A Crash Landing

By Michael Grose



In parenting circles two decades ago, the biggest issues revolved around under-parenting. Neglected kids, kids with poor or delinquent behaviour, and raising kids that lived on society's margins were popular media topics in the early 1990s.

Two decades later, it's over-parenting that captures the main media attention. Spoilt kids, kids with a false sense of entitlement and parents that places excessive demands on schools are hot topics. These all fit into the over-parenting, or more colloquial 'helicopter parenting' category.

Is over-parenting new?

While we hear a great deal about over-parenting at present, it's not a new phenomenon. Parents of past generations have been overly protective and over-indulgent of their offspring at times. However, it does seem that many parents today are a little over-enthusiastic in their quest to optimise the future prospects of their children.

In fact, the defining feature of 21st century parents is a fierce determination to provide children with the best possible childhood and the best possible start in life. In pursuit of these admirable goals, a parent can easily over-extend their role, entering areas of children's lives that would have been off-limits to parents a couple of generations ago.

How to know if you are over-parenting

It's a quirk of 21st century parenting that we need an objective measure to assess our parenting. Past generations were satisfied with more subjective measures, such as whether their kids were happy, whether they got good marks at school, whether they were employable and whether or not they stayed out of trouble. It's safe to say, the parenting waters were far clearer in the past than they appear to be now. But the parenting industry has come a long way in a short time, so

we now have stringent indicators that let us know what parenting track we maybe on. And that, for many people, would appear to be the over-parenting track.

You know you are over-parenting if:

1. You take on all, or nearly all, of your child's problems

Kids are good at hand-balling their problems to their parents. They'll bring disputes with siblings to you to sort, expect you to take forgotten lunches to school and pester you to organise their after-school lives. Mums and dads that over-parent invariably end up sorting out all their children's problems, which may make life easier in the short-term, but can mean kids become more dependent on their parents than children in the past.

Point to remember: Leave some problems for kids to solve themselves

2. You regularly do for a child the things he or she can reasonably do for themselves

It's an irony of modern life that the busier parents get, the more we tend to do for our kids. In the race to get things done, we dress young children; prepare children's snacks and accompany them on trips outside the house even when they are old enough to do these activities themselves. If your child is becoming more, rather than less dependent the older he or she becomes, then it's probably time to reassess your parenting.

Point to remember: Never regularly do for a child the things they can do for themselves

3. You take on too many of your child's responsibilities

Let's see how you go with these questions: "Who's responsible for getting your child up each morning? Who's responsible for packing lunches and bags? Who is responsible for cleaning away children's toys?" If you answered "my children, of course" then congratulations -- you shifted responsibility to where it rightfully lies -- with kids. If not, then you guessed it... it may be time for a parenting reassessment.

Point to remember: If you want a child to be responsible, give the task to them.

4. You know too much about your child's life

Being an attentive parent of a small family invariably means that you know, in minute detail, every quirk and vagary of your child's life. "He didn't eat all his breakfast this morning. Hmm. That's not good." "She seems a bit grumpy after school. What's wrong?" "They left their jumper at home. I'd better take it to them." Kids benefit from having some emotional and physical space from their parents. It gives them chances to rely on their own resourcefulness and develop the skills needed to get by on their own.

Point to remember: A little bit of benign neglect can benefit children's development.

5. You parent the individual, not the gang

If you are constantly trying to make sure life is smooth for each child, then you are probably parenting the individual, rather than for the good of the whole family. I'm not talking about 'playing favourites', but having an intense focus on meeting each individual's wants at the expense of the family-life in general. For instance, you allow a child to go to a sleepover rather than attend the birthday of a sibling. Parenting the gang means that children need to fit into the patterns of family-life and don't always get what they want.

Point to remember: Raise your small family with a big-family mindset.

Most of the research indicates the authoritative approach as parenting best practice. Authoritative parenting is a mix of firmness and warmth; discipline and nurturing; high expectations and relationship building. It's an approach that sits... surprise, surprise... somewhere between over-parenting and under-parenting.

Yep, as always, a balanced approach to parenting seems to be the best way to go. Who would've thought it?

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