

When a child is overparented

By Thuy Yau



Overparenting can have a crippling effect on kids as they age. Photo: Getty

I couldn't swallow any form of tablet until I was 19-years-old. I would pop it in my mouth, manoeuvre it randomly across my tongue, and feel incredibly anxious about whether I was doing it the right way. My inability to do such a simple thing paralysed me. It made me feel pathetic because I couldn't do something that most other people could.

I remember being a 16-year-old who was going through the typical motions of the teenage years - wondering whether I liked who I was, wondering if the boy I had a crush on felt the same way, wondering if studying web design was really what I wanted to do. But on top of those everyday worries, I was a child whose drama teacher thought she was lying when she said she didn't know how to unlock the door with a key.

I came from a family of six. It was my mum, my dad, my two older brothers, my younger sister and me. My mum never hugged or kissed me. She never once asked me how my day was. She didn't believe in talking about emotions. She never enjoyed answering my questions.

But she was the sort of mum who would love me in only the way she knew how – by expressing it through her actions. By driving me to school every day for 13 years, because she was afraid of me taking the bus. By cleaning up my room when I was at school. She rarely asked me to do anything

around the house. I would offer many times, but she always felt it her responsibility to do all those things.

I moved out of home when I was 18-years-old, but I never knew how to swallow a tablet until I was 19. I never needed to find out. Every time I had a headache, a fever, or a stomach ache – my mum would crush it for me with a spoon. She just didn't think it was necessary to explain how to swallow it.

I didn't brush my own hair until I was a 17-year-old, because she thought it was her responsibility to do it for me. I never complained because it felt nice to have her touch me – it almost made up for the hugs and kisses I longed to receive from her.

I struggled being around people I hardly knew. I felt anxious about driving to new places. If I was ever confident enough to try something new but made a mistake along the way, I'd tell myself, "See. This is why you should never try anything new."

It took me several years after moving out of home, to realise that it's worthwhile trying new things. That mistakes are part of the learning process. That it's okay to ask questions. It also took the love of my kind and patient husband to help me understand that I'm more capable than I realise.

To this day, I know that my mum was doing what she thought was best for me. Doing what she could to make my life easier. But instead, what she did was never give me the chance to learn for myself. She never gave me the chance to make mistakes, get confused, then ask for help.

Dr. Judith Locke, clinical psychologist and founder of training company, Confident and Capable, has done research on 'overparenting' with her team at Queensland University of Technology. Their 2012 study found a worrying trend of overparenting, with experts concerned that overbearing parents are raising children unable to cope with failure and life outside of home.

"For a child to develop resilience and be able to cope with the demands of the world, then they need to gradually become more and more independent as time goes on and capable of living an independent life," said Locke.

If a parent is continuing to cut their 10-year-old's sandwiches, refusing to let their 17-year-old catch a train, spending hours on their child's homework, rushing to their aid when they've forgotten their lunch at home – although their actions are coming from a place of love, they might be depriving their children of "the opportunity to discover that they're capable".

Locke explains that we should be striving to raise children who grow into adults who can bounce back from challenges.

"You learn resilience by facing occasional difficulty and working out ways you can cope with life not going your way all the time," says Locke.

I've come a long way since those days of having my tablets crushed for me. But to a smaller but still significant extent, the anxiety still lives on inside me.

It's left psychological scars that are still taking time to heal. I'm getting there though.

Source; http://www.essentialkids.com.au/younger-kids/kids-development/when-a-child-is-overparented-20140730-3cu0b.html#utm_source=FD&utm_medium=lifeandstylepuff&utm_campaign=overparenting