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The Negative Effects of Helicopter Parting on Children Ages 10-17

James DeMint, US Senator of South Carolina from 2005-2013, once said, “One of the greatest titles in the world is parent, and one of the biggest blessings in the world is to have parents to call mom and dad.” Parenting is a limited opportunity, one which presents a new world of responsibilities including: protection, education, support, and love, wholly for the benefit of their children; thus, these responsibilities create a foundation of the important values and responsibilities that are needed to develop a child mentally and physically. However, parent’s interpretations of these responsibilities vary on a broad spectrum. At the far end of the spectrum, belongs the parents whom take their responsibilities to the extent of their child being protected from all harm and mistakes; consequently, they are initiating the impairment of their child’s mental and physical growth and development. These parents, specifically termed helicopter parents, hover over their children and perform extreme forms of protection that create an immature sense of responsibilities and render the development of the child’s life skills. Children under the eyes of helicopter parents suffer from academic, social, psychological, and long-term independence difficulties that undermine their future. Fundamental building-blocks of social functioning are absent in the minds of helicopter parents. These overprotective parents are depriving children ages 10-17 of necessary, humane frustrations and disappointments; thus, they create the dependent, childish adult.

Helicopter parenting is a style of parenting overly focused on the experiences and challenges of a child’s life; thus, this parenting style causes a diminution of a child’s awareness of their independence and inhibits their personal development through the parent’s extreme protective actions (Bayless). The derivation of helicopter parenting originated from Dr. Haim Ginotts’ 1969 book’s, *Parents and Teenagers,* interviews of teenagers that stated their parents would constantly hover over them like helicopters; hence, the term helicopter parenting became an official dictionary term in 2011 (Bayless). Helicopter parenting is demonstrated periodically throughout a child’s lifetime as a toddler, middle-schooler, high-schooler and college student and progress in intensity through their parent’s actions. Throughout these stages of life, parents are prominent and influential in the education, social life, mental mindset, and decision-making aspects of their child’s life; thus, helicopter parents must completely engulf those aspects of life their child’s and remain oblivious to necessary, developmental life struggles. The deleterious behaviors of a helicopter parent can include: constantly communicating with their child to know what they are doing, tracking them through a device, completely doing their homework for them, filling out an application for them, or resolving social and personal issues for their child. Therefore, one might ask what the reasoning for these actions are. The reason for their hovering originates from societal pressure, success-driven anxiety, and the fear of failure; thus, these predisposed explanations create a false sense of over-responsibility for parents influencing them to take to extreme actions of protection. Studies exemplify that helicopter parents anticipate an attachment with their children that fulfills what is missing from their other social relationships, such as marriage and social life (Marano). Overall, helicopter parents “are putting their own emotional needs ahead of the developmental needs of their children” (Marano). These emotional and social needs of the helicopter parent, take a higher purpose over the independence and personal growth of their child; thus, creating a detrimental parent-child relationship.

Childhood is a time of development and transition. An important transition in a child’s life is the transition through their academic career. Academics give a foundation of child cognitive developmental skills such as: problem solving skills, decision making, and necessary frustrations such as failure. All three of these skills are connected in a way that they provide mistakes and disappointments necessary to the cognitive development of the child. However, the swallowing of the independence of a child would remove these disappointments, thus inhibiting the cognitive, developmental education of the child. Poor problem solving skills is a prominent negative effect of helicopter parenting because of the parent’s false sense of responsibility by helping answer a child’s homework question to just completely doing their homework for them. These parents hide their child’s mistakes, blocking the idea of disappointment and failure from their mind. When their child seems to be in stress, the helicopter parents swoop down to rescue the child from drowning in any type of stress. Therefore, when the child is supposed to be learning independently at school, they are still depending on their parent back at home to know everything for them. A study at Bringham Young University was conducted on 483 students from four American universities. Students that were surveyed, were asked about their parents’ behaviors and their own self-esteem, risks that they take, and academics. This study suggested that “children of such controlling parents are less engaged in the classroom” (Greenberg). These children are less engaged due to their upbringing with a parent oblivious to the need for academic stress in childhood. Larry Nelson, the study’s author stated that “overall, stepping in and doing for a child what the child developmentally should be doing for him or herself is negative” (Bringham Young University 2). Developmental tools such as problem solving and decision making presented through academia are removed from the lives of overprotected children, due to the anxiety of failure within the minds of their parents. In the area of academia, transitioning between grades and classes without experience as an independent learner, will shift the anxiety and social problems previously seen in the helicopter parents, to their children.

The time period between ages 10-17 is the stage of development in which children need to form relationships, interact independently, form a social identity, and connect personally with others. However, the social actions and relationship of a helicopter parents with their children can harm these necessary developments. In the book, *The Overparenting Epidemic: Why Helicopter Parenting Is Bad for Your Kids… and Dangerous for You, Too!,* the authors include these extreme social actions taken by helicopter parenting: harassing coaches for more playing time, emailing teachers to get a better grade, scrounging for jobs for their kids, having their child have cosmetic surgery before developed, tracking, and giving their children inappropriate gifts (Glass). However, some children disregard these extreme actions because of the relationship they have with their parent. Children have an innate connection, named attachment, “usually formed within the first 6 months of the infant’s life” (Ciccarelli 300). This attachment impacts the way children grow to form other relationships with other people. Friends, teachers, coaches are just a few examples of relationships formed outside of family. These relationships however, cannot be based through the dependence of the child on the subject of the bond. Due to the acts of a helicopter parent, their children create a dependent mind set, making it difficult for them to form and maintain relationships. They lack the skills necessary to survive and cope with situations that come with relationships. This lack of social skills “can hinder the development of a harmonious relationship with other people. Some of these children have difficulties making relationship and marriage choices without deferring to their parents' decisions” (Daniel). Without the necessary relationships to socially categorize themselves, helicopter parented children are unable to fully develop their social identity and concept. Social identity is formed through the social categorization of yourself into your community; and, also, social concept is how someone views themselves through the opinions of their peers (Ciccarelli 386). Thus, if a child is unable to form a relationship their social interaction is limited; therefore, difficulties arise within a child that is not able to identify themselves with their peers. Instead the child is dependent on the attachment and connection with their parent and can create a false sense of narcissism within the child. Thus, this makes it even harder for the child to personally connect with their peers. When a child of a narcissistic mind set is thrown into an interaction or situation with their peers, they will continue to feel as if they cannot fail, making it even harder for them to create their social identity. These helicopter parents are unconsciously using their attachment to deprive their child of their social identity. This robbing of identity is considered an indirect form of child abuse and forms social confusion that leads to detrimental psychological difficulties.

Transitioning through life without a strong foundation of independence or identity will eventually progress into psychological illness. In an article from *The Parent Herald*, the author provides examples of these difficulties by stating, “the results of helicopter parenting could be the development of over anxiety, fear, panic syndrome, and depression and isolation tendencies” (Daniel). Depression and low self-esteem are influenced through the need-frustrating relationships between helicopter parents and their children. Independence, competence, and empathy are the three psychological needs of a human being presented in the SDT, self-determination theoretical framework (Reed 3137). Behaviors such as constant texting and calling or controlling diet habits of a child frustrate the basic psychological needs of a child. These actions make a child insecure of their abilities and look as situations as too complicated and give up, weakening their self-esteem. Longwood Psychology professor, Dr. Chris Bjornsen, stated that helicopter parenting “won’t allow the child to demonstrate the skills necessary to build self-esteem. Also, children would feel like their mom and dad are smothering them, making them believe they are not competent enough to take care of things on my own” (Bjornsen). Previous studies and research present that “about seventy-five percent of psychiatric illnesses are developed in the transition to adulthood” (Viner). Helicopter parenting facilitates these illnesses; thus, the psychological effects from these parents add to the percentage stated above. It is inferred from this fact that the reason for the abundance of these developments in this transition is because of the lack of autonomy in the lives of the helicopter parent, children. The transition into college is the first ultimate test of a child to begin to live independently as a young adult. Recent surveys have shown a surge in mental illness in the generation where helicopter parenting has flourished. The National Survey of College Counseling Centers reported that “89% of directors reported an increase in student anxiety disorders, 58% reported an increase in student clinical depression, and 35% reported an increase in self injury issues, over the past five years” (Reed 3136). It is not just a coincidence that five years ago helicopter parenting was entered as a term in the dictionary and that five years is when these increases were noticed. As the generations of helicopter reach college campuses the cut of the cord between helicopter parent and their child have facilitated mental illnesses to become a top concern for administrators and professors. Helicopter parenting is the reason for these surges in young adult mental illness. Helicopter parenting weakens a child’s confidence in their own abilities making obstacles hard to overcome, which will result in low-self-esteem and other mental difficulties.

A childhood full of dependency academically, socially, and mentally will create negative long term effects on a child’s life. Long term effects from helicopter parenting include unemployment, long term psychological problems, and drug abuse. The reoccurring, prominent problem with helicopter parenting is that the parents make their children’s mistakes disappear. Therefore, when the child becomes an young adult and a problem occurs, the young adult is most often unable to take responsibility or find the fault in their own mistakes. Several media reports have recently mentioned the involvement of helicopter parents in the job application process for young adults. Millennials have been reported to ask questions to employers like “Can my parents come to my interview”, or “Can my parents negotiate my salary” (Begley). Millennials have shown to continue their dependency on their parents during the job process after college; “8 percent of recent college grads brought their parents along to an interview” (Berman). The independence diminishing facts continue through Martinko’s statement that, “30% of recruiters have had a parent submit a resume for their child and 25% have been contacted by a parent who feels their child should receive a job.” Due to the need for involvement of a parent in the job process, one can assume that a young adult or college grad with a helicopter parent runs into trouble when finding a job. Consequently, unemployment will influence psychological stress, which could enhance the disorders already created within the young adult through their helicopter parent. Authors, George Glass and David Tabtsky, stated in their novel that, “[they] are essentially undermining [their] children’s long-term development, and are inhibiting their self-esteem and self-confidence” (Glass). This inhibition of self- esteem and self- confidence originates from a child’s dependence on their helicopter parent to pick up their mistakes and correct them. If this mistakes are not corrected, a young adult could become stressed to the point that they will fall unto substances to support themselves. Smoking and binge drinking have been reported in the lives of young adults that had the umbilical cord severed from the helicopter parent so quickly that they begin to depend on substance instead of people (Martinko). These long term effects are detrimental to the development on the young adult during their transition into adulthood.

Academic participation, social skills, psychological health, and long term goals are effected by the extremes of helicopter parenting. Transitioning and developing is a big part of childhood. The transitions from toddler to young adult, pre-k to college, and the transitions within one’s mind while he or she develops, requires a strong foundation of independence and responsibility. Helicopter parents are depriving children of necessary frustrations to become a developed independent adult. The tracking, the completing of full homework assignments, and the filling out of their child’s application are the extremes taken be these parents, that can be diminishing to child development. These deprivations can lead to academic failure, under developed social skills, lack of social interaction, and substance abuse. These helicopter parents continue to unconsciously diminish the development of their children through their “protective parent” attitudes. Laura Schlessinger, an American writer from the 1900s, once said “Children are our second chance to have a great parent-child relationship.” Now, wouldn’t one want this second chance to flourish the life and development of their child instead of inhibiting it?

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