

Are you a Helicopter Parent?

The term "helicopter parent" has been coined in recent years to describe a mother or father who pays extremely close attention to their child's life. Students who have grown up with this type of "hovering" parenthood often have difficulty making the transition from high school to college.

To see if you may have some of the tendencies to be a helicopter parent, you may want to answer the following questions:

Your student has left for school and while having your second cup of coffee you notice an important folder containing homework to be turned in which has been left behind on the kitchen counter. Do you:

- A. Rush to get in the car and deliver the folder to your child at school.
- B. Make a mental note to remind your child later in the day about the oversight and try to teach some organizational techniques, which will help for the future.

Your student comes home from school and reports that he/she has been wrongly disciplined by a teacher for a minor behavior issue. Do you:

- A. Call the teacher to find out what happened and advocate for your child's explanation of the incident.
- B. Talk to your child about the importance of following and/or adjusting to the teacher's rules and talk over strategies for preventing this type of problem.

Your child is having difficulty getting around to completing homework tasks at night. Do you:

- A. Sit down with your child and actually do most of the assignments yourself to show how it is done.
- B. Have a designated area and time for the child to complete homework with you nearby to answer questions and make suggestions how to start.

If you answered "A" to the above questions and your child is in first grade you may be ok. However, if you were an "A" responder and your child is in high school, you may possess helicopter tendencies. Rushing assignments to school may help the student with the immediate grade in the class but in the long run your student will not be developing his own self management skills necessary for later college success. Children need to suffer the consequences of their own mistakes in order to learn. Children also need skills to handle their own confrontations or difficulties with teachers and figure out how to manage their homework on their own.

Parents naturally want to protect their children and make their lives easier and more pleasant, but at what price? As children get older, parents need to be less and less involved with their daily lives, gradually teaching new self-management skills and allowing them to develop their own coping strategies. Learning how to solve life's small problems is required for children to grow into adulthood with the necessary skills to handle life's larger problems.

Technology such as cell phones and e-mail have made it possible for college students and their parents to remain in almost constant contact despite being actually hundreds of miles apart, thus fostering helicopter parenting behaviors. However, parental over-involvement during the college years can hinder the development of competency, self-esteem and independence needed not only for college success but also for effective transition into adulthood.

If you are a parent concerned about your high school student's developing independence, his or her readiness to handle going off to college, and your own fears of being too intrusive as a helicopter parent, counselors at Jewish Family and Vocational Service (452-6341) are available to help with these and/or other college related issues.

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