

Expert discusses repercussions of helicopter parenting

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It's no secret that most parents only want what is best for their children, but what happens when parents become too involved in their lives? One Baylor College of Medicine expert explains the repercussions helicopter

parenting can have on children.

"The term helicopter parent usually refers to a situation where a parent is overinvolved in a [child](#) or young person's life. For example, a helicopter parent may go to great lengths to get their child into a private school or a certain kind of program early on in the child's [academic career](#) or it may involve them trying to make sure their child makes it onto a certain sports team," said Dr. Karen Lawson, a [clinical psychologist](#) and assistant professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "During the latter years of high school when students are making decisions about colleges is also a common time when parents can become overinvolved."

There may be many reasons that someone engages in helicopter parenting, Lawson said.

"It is really important for parents to examine why they might be overinvolved. Some different reasons for this may be simply a desire to protect their kids or they could have experienced a situation in their past that they don't want to happen to their kids. Another reason might be that a parent is fearful that a child might not do something right, and they don't have enough confidence or faith in their child that they can do a good job. However, another reason may be that they are trying to guide their child in a direction that they themselves wish they had gone so they are essentially trying to live vicariously through their kids," she said.

While parents should be interested and help guide their children in a good direction, Lawson said that it is vital for them to remember that part of their jobs as parents is to allow for their children to gain gradual independence.

"Helicopter parents should try to take a step back and allow their children to make choices for themselves. However, they can still provide

structure and make suggestions. Instead of involving themselves right away, wait until the child asks for help or ask if they need help. This gives the child a little bit more control over the situation, and they may not feel like they were told what to do or controlled fully," Lawson said.

If [children](#) are not given the opportunity to make their own choices, Lawson warns they may not develop the problem-solving skills needed to face life's challenges.

"As [parents](#), clearly we don't want to see our child fail, but unfortunately, failure is a part of life and an essential part of growing up. Luckily, these failures can offer important life lessons. Many people actually say they learned the most from some of the things they failed at," Lawson said. "One of the best ways to help your child cope with failure is to have created a safe, structured environment so they feel like they can talk to you about it and you can help them work through it."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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