

Helping or hovering? A parent's dilemma

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When is it time for parents to back away? A new study shows that college students with overcontrolling parents are more likely to be depressed and less satisfied with their lives. This so-called helicopter parenting style negatively affects students' well-being by violating their need to feel both autonomous and competent. The work, by Holly Schiffrin and colleagues from the University of Mary Washington in the United States, is published online in Springer's *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.

Parental overinvolvement may lead to negative outcomes in children, including higher levels of depression and anxiety. Studies also suggest that children of overinvolved or overcontrolling parents may feel less competent and less able to manage life and its [stressors](#). In contrast, evidence suggests that some [parental involvement](#) in children's lives facilitates healthy development, both emotionally and socially.

Children's need for [autonomy](#) increases over time as they strive to become independent [young adults](#). Among college administrators, concern is shared that parents do not adjust their level of involvement and control as their child grows up and, instead, practice helicopter parenting.

Schiffrin and her team examined how parenting behaviors affect the psychological well-being of children by looking at college students' self-determination. A total of 297 American undergraduate students, aged 18-23 years, answered an online survey. They were asked to describe their mothers' parenting behaviors, rate their own perceptions of their

autonomy, competence, and relatedness (i.e., how well they get along with other people). The researchers also assessed the students' overall satisfaction with life, their level of anxiety, and whether or not they suffered [depressive symptoms](#).

Overall, an inappropriate level of parental behavioral control was linked to negative well-being outcomes for students. Helicopter parenting behaviors were related to higher levels of depression and decreased satisfaction with life. In addition, helicopter parenting behaviors were associated with lower levels of perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness. And those who perceived they had less autonomy and competence were also more likely to be depressed.

The authors conclude that helicopter parenting is a highly involved, intensive, and hands-on method of parenting. Their research suggests that intense involvement is considered by some parents to be supportive, whereas it may actually be perceived as controlling and undermining by their children. "Parents should keep in mind how developmentally appropriate their involvement is and learn to adjust their [parenting style](#) when their children feel that they are hovering too closely."

Provided by Springer

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