

# HELICOPTER PARENTING: FROM GOOD INTENTIONS TO POOR OUTCOMES

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## ABSTRACT

*Gaining independence from various restriction set by parents is overjoy for adolescent. However, it does not always happen as it planned. Helicopter parenting referred to the excessive engagement of parents similar to hovering around their children to rescue from hazardous and preventing them from experiencing failure. Higher life satisfaction and better psychological wellbeing have been found in the children of highly intrusive parents. When there are positive effects of helicopter parenting, there are negative outcome and impacts that have also been studied. The difficulties in emotional regulation, academic productivity, and social skills among children raised by helicopter parenting. Low self-efficacy, lack of trust on peers, and alienation from peers have also been associated with helicopter parenting. The associated mental health issues and supportive psychological intervention to be also discussed.*

**Keywords:** #helicopterparenting #parentingstyle #psychologicaleffects #mentalhealth #intervention #hoverparenting #depression

*“The point of parenting is not to have all the answers before we start out but instead to figure it out on the go as our children grow. Because as they do, so will we.”*

*-Bridgett Miller*

## INTRODUCTION

*“How to begin to educate a child. First rule: leave him alone. Second rule: leave him alone. Third rule: leave him alone. That is the whole beginning.”*

*– D.H. Lawrence*

### What is Helicopter Parenting?

The term “helicopter parent” was first used in Dr. Haim Ginott's 1969 book *Parents & Teenagers* by teens who said their parents would hover over them like a helicopter. Helicopter parenting refers to “a style of parents who are overly focused on their children”<sup>1</sup> “They typically take too much responsibility for their children's experiences and, specifically, their successes or failures,” Dr. Daitch says.<sup>2</sup>

Ann Dunnewold, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and author of *Even June Cleaver Would Forget the Juice Box*, says the helicopter parenting definition is simply “over-parenting.” **“It means being involved in a child's life in a way i.e. over controlling, over protecting and over perfecting, in a way that is in excess of responsible parenting.”** Dr. Dunnewold explains.

It means staying very close, rarely out of reach, paying extremely close attention to your child and rushing over to prevent any harm, physically and psychologically, to the point of enmeshment. This is where personal boundaries are diffused, sub-systems undifferentiated and over-concern leads to a loss of autonomous development.

However, one 2014 study evaluating the impact of this style on college students found that students raised by so-called helicopter parents were more likely to be on medication for anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup>

Helicopter parenting can be defined three types of behaviors that parents exemplify:

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Daitch, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Daitch, Ph.D., Author of *Anxiety Disorders: The Go-To Guide*.

<sup>3</sup> What is helicopter parenting?, available at: <https://www.healthline.com/health/parenting/helicopter-parenting#how-to-avoid> (last seen on Feb 07, 2021).

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- First, information seeking behaviors include knowing your children's daily schedule and where they are at all times, helping them make decisions, and being informed about grades and other accomplishments.
- Second, direct intervention means jumping into conflicts with kids' roommates, friends, romantic partners, and even bosses.
- Third, autonomy limiting is when students think their parents are preventing them from making their own mistakes, controlling their lives for them, and failing to support their decisions.

### HELICOPTER PARENTING IN INDIA

*The question posed by the typical Indian parent is this: If we do not pressurize our child to study, how will they get that (coveted) degree seat in an engineering or medical college?"<sup>4</sup>*

India is moving towards modernization and there is lot of competition over the children and there is peer pressure and parental pressure. With all these pressure students may become so tense and many of the students express suicidal thoughts. Helicopter Parenting contributes to poor academic performance, lack of motivation, social interaction problems, and even self-harm. On top of all this, the stigma behind mental health in our country is another giant that stands high above children. During such circumstances, some parents even go into denial, resorting to statements such as, "My child has no such problems", "This is just a slump. He/she will get over it". ***But how will they "get over it" if the pressure continues to rise until the bottle bursts?*** Depression is not something that is gotten over with like a rip of a Band-Aid, it requires months and sometimes even years to heal through constant emotional support from loved ones.

Apart from academics, children are also bogged down by rising expectations in various areas where they have their own interests like sports, music, arts, etc. Hence, without giving care to the wholesome development of a student, parents keep on pushing the boundaries that ultimately leads to stress, disappointment, anxiety and suicides. In a study conducted on 190 students from grade 11 to 12 from 3 private schools in Kolkata and 3 government- aided schools, it was found out that

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<sup>4</sup> *Helicopter Parenting is trending in India. Here's why, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/between-the-lines/helicopter-parenting-is-trending-in-india-heres-why/articleshow/56643913.cms> (last seen on Feb 08, 2021).*

almost two-thirds of the students experienced pressure from their parents to perform better academically.<sup>5</sup>

### PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF HELICOPTER PARENTING

Every parent wants to raise their child with love, support, and care. While taking care of their children, they use different kinds of approaches. This used approach invokes range of responses and reactions in children and later impacts the psychological, emotional, social and interpersonal development. The helicopter parenting can influence child in a negative, positive, or mixed manner. Children of helicopter parenting have been found with higher life satisfaction and better psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, the children raised with helicopter parenting style have been observed to display a difficulty in decision making.

#### • Positive Impact

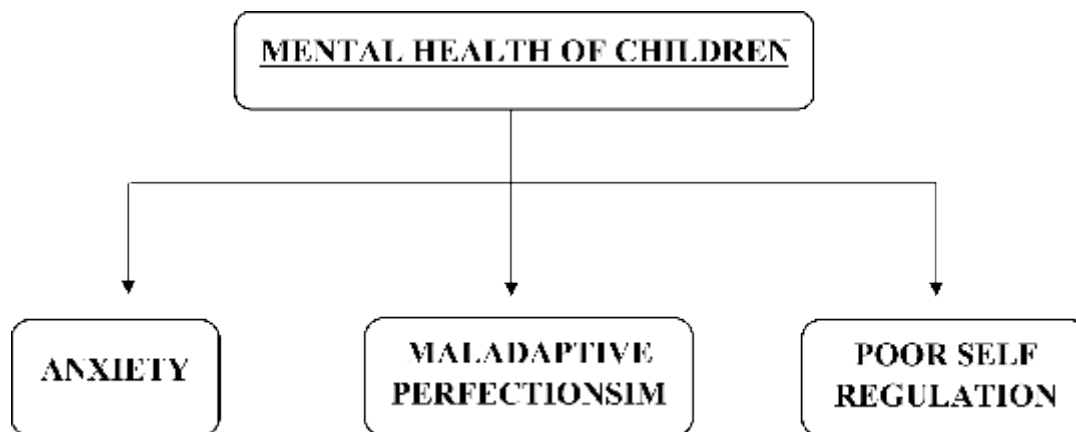
Theoretically, greater degree of parental involvement, help, and directedness leads the child to develop the belief that they are worthy of intensive care and attention from others and impede the development of age appropriate coping skills. The research studies suggest positive correlation with psychological and behavioral control with parental involvement. Children of helicopter parenting have been found with educational gains and satisfaction in academics with the help of parental engagement.

#### • Negative Impact

Children coming from a background of parental overprotectiveness display a greater tendency to utilize dysfunctional emotion focused on coping strategies (Such as fantasizing and greater self- preoccupation). Thus, due to overabundance of intervention and problem solving on part of the parent, the child does not face the

developmentally appropriate challenges that aid the building of necessary coping skills. Parental over control is linked to reduce self-perceived confidence and psychological wellbeing that influence the development of adequate coping skills.

5 *Parent's expectations and academic pressure: A major cause of stress among students, available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/parent-s-expectations-and-academic-pressure-a-major-cause-of-stress-among-students-1743857-2020-11-25> (last seen on Feb 08, 2021)*



- **ANXIETY**- Young adults reared with helicopter parenting style have been observed to be more prone to developing separation anxiety and panic attacks. The separation anxiety leads by parents and by the child often leads to homesickness at the campus during night. During college life, parental intrusion and control affect the autonomy of young adults leading to a sense of lack of autonomy and control over their life. Over and above affect the child psychologically and increase the chances of anxiety disorder.

- **MALADAPTIVE PERFECTIONISM**- Parents having higher expectations regarding academic performance from their children often lead to behaviours that convey that whatever their child is doing is never good enough. Therefore, children of such parents often experience greater emotional distress when they make some mistakes and also tend to be more anxious, more self-critical, and depressed. This tendency of getting afraid while making a mistake and blaming themselves for not being perfect termed as “maladaptive perfectionism”. Research highlights that the anxiety can be triggered among the kids who already facing some social issues by helicopter parenting.

In a research (done on parents and their children), the children were given 10- minute time period to complete as many puzzles as possible. Parents were given freedom to help their children; however, at the same time, they were not encouraged to do. It was noticed that the children with social issues were helped by their parents often than the other parents did. Even when the children did not ask the parents to step in, they were not negative or critical. The findings suggested that parents of children with social issues perceive challenging 6

situation more threatening than children. Moreover, it diminishes the ability of a child to succeed on their own and increases the anxiety.

- **POOR SELF REGULATION**- Low self-efficacy, lack of trust among peers, and alienation from peers were associated with helicopter parenting. Helicopter parenting was also found to be associated with low self-esteem that made children dependent on family members. Children of helicopter parenting are prone to depression in adulthood. Helicopter parenting is found to have lower quality of parent-child communication and lower family satisfaction. Poor self-regulation was seen as another outcome of helicopter parenting.

To summarize, Helicopter Parenting behaviors may also interfere with feeling a sense of competence because such parental actions can convey the message that parents do not have faith in their child's abilities. Furthermore, when parents solve problems for their children, then children may not develop the confidence and competence to solve their own problems.

### LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

This type of excessive parenting, even though don with genuine intention has some serious kickbacks and severe long-term consequences that most are not aware of. Here is the list of these effects:

- Underdevelopment of the brain.
- Emotional backlash.
- Low self-esteem and confidence.
- Immature coping skills, low frustration tolerance = disadvantage in the work force.
- Mental health problems.
- Sense of entitlement complex.
- Meanness and aggression.

### **HOW CAN PARENTS GIVE UP CONTROL?**

- Stop saying “we”! I catch parents saying this a lot “we need to go home to do homework”. Rather it should be “we need to go home so you can do homework”.
- Stop arguing with adults in your kid's life. Let them do the problem solving, but you can guide them.
- Stop solving kid's problem, stop doing their homework.
- Stop evaluating child on their parent's conditions rather it should be more towards self-evaluation by the child which will help him to gain experience and enhance better understanding in their potential play area.

**Keep in mind a good motto: “Our job as parents is to put ourselves out of job!!”**

### **LET THEM FALL!**

A child is a tight rope walker in a circus (life), his aim is to walk that tight rope as safely as possible and get through the walk with his head held high, a sense of accomplishment, joy and unscathed as much as possible.

### **BUT BE THE NET.**

Now, if parents are not the hand holder but are the net, what happens? Slowly, the fear subsides, the sweating subsides, the wobbly knees dissipate and they start walking straighter, they start walking with confidence, they start smiling, they are sturdy and know in their gut and in their heart beyond a shadow of a doubt that “They can do it on their own”.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

All parents know that parenting is not easy. Having children and raising them presents innumerable challenges and surprises, but also immense joy and connection. Now that parents know that over parenting only leads to more problems for the kids, parents can make the following adjustments in our parenting approach:

- ✓ Support the children's growth and independence by listening to them, and not always pushing the desires on them.
- ✓ Refrain from doing everything for the children. Take steps to gradually teach them how to accomplish tasks on their own.
- ✓ Don't try to help children escape consequences for their actions unless parents believe those consequences are unfair or life-altering.
- ✓ Don't raise the child to expect to be treated differently than other children.
- ✓ Encourage the children to solve their own problems by asking them to come up with creative solutions.
- ✓ Teach children to speak up for themselves in a respectful manner.
- ✓ Understand and accept the children's weaknesses and strengths, and help them to use their strengths to achieve their own goals.

Parenting and parenting style are an intricate and complex phenomenon that is determined by a number of factors, both individual and contextual. Furthermore, parenting choices not only yield a here-and-now result but also have long-lasting implications on the psychophysiological health of the child.

*“Allowing your teen to explore different facets of self and claim their identity in healthy ways is key to remaining supportive and staying involved in their lives.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Heather Senior Monroe, Licensed Psychotherapist and Director of Program Development at Newport Academy.

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