

# Are You a Helicopter Parent?

## Introduction:

One of the most difficult activities you will experience is allowing your child to leave for college AND allowing yourself the freedom to let your college student make choices (good and bad) own their own. You will experience many emotions: you are so excited for them to "leave the nest", but you are frightened that they are leaving you and won't need you anymore. You are excited that they are entering a world that will last them a lifetime, but you are frightened that they might meet "the man (or woman) of their dreams" and you certainly won't have the same feelings. You think you have a good idea of the costs and sacrifices that you have made, but you are afraid that the money won't be there. You are excited about this new opportunity for them and the entire family, but you are worried that they won't take advantage of it. Let me give you some practical advice "These feelings *will* pass and everything really *will* work out."

I speak from experience as I have allowed my three daughters to leave home, live in a dorm, live in an apartment(s), experience heartaches, "fight their own battles", receive their grades before I did, avoid the temptation to intervene in their personal lives, and still remain a supportive parent.

I am attaching an article taken from a great website: [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). I encourage all parents with HS and college students to keep in constant contact with this website. The information is invaluable. (By the way, all three of my daughters graduated and met the men of their dreams, and they are wonderful!)

Charlotte Winkelmann, M.Ed.  
Asst. Director of Student Support Services  
Austin Independent School District

Article from [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

## "Are you a Helicopter Parent?"

You may have heard the term "helicopter parent." More and more colleges and universities are using it. But what exactly does it mean? Helicopter parents hover. They are always on the lookout for threats to their children's success and happiness. If a problem does surface, these parents are ready to swoop in and save the day.

In recent years, colleges have reported that helicopter parents are making their presence felt on campus. They are intervening in roommate disputes, registering their children for classes, and questioning professors' grades. The consequences of such behavior have been negative for students, parents, and colleges.

### How Do You Know If You're a Helicopter Parent?

If the following items describe you, then you're probably over managing your child's life:

#### 1. You are in constant contact with your child.

Cell phones have led to frequent communication between parents and children. If you dial your child's number every day or multiple times each day, then you are hovering. And if your child calls home at any sign of stress or trouble, you are likely over involved.

#### 2. You are in constant contact with school administration.

One of the main goals of going to college is for kids to grow into independent adults who can direct their own affairs. If you're emailing or phoning school officials on a regular basis to *resolve your child's conflicts*, then you are over managing.

### **3. You make your child's academic decisions.**

If you are choosing courses, majors, and a career path for your child, then you are too involved. Giving advice or input is certainly acceptable and warranted, but being in control of these types of decisions is a sure sign of hovering. On that note, if you ever find yourself doing research or writing a paper for your child, you are definitely a helicopter parent.

### **4. You feel bad about yourself if your child does not do well.**

If you consider schooling an experience involving both parent and child, then you probably view your child's accomplishments, or lack thereof, as a reflection on you. Helicopter parents base their own self-worth on their children's success. If you feel like a failure when your child fails, you are hovering.

### **What Are the Negative Effects of Helicopter Parenting?**

Parents may have complex reasons for hovering. No matter what the motive is though, the results of doing so are negative for everyone involved. Harmful effects of helicopter parenting include the following:

- **Children's growth is stunted.**

Helicopter parents seem to be stunting their children's maturation. Numerous students are arriving at college without basic social and survival skills. They lack knowledge about how to negotiate for what they need, to coexist with other people in shared living quarters, to stay safe, and to solve their own problems. With their parents always ready to step in, kids are failing to learn accountability and responsibility.

- **Parents feel more anxiety.**

Research indicates that helicopter parents' mental health is suffering. One study released by the Society for Research in Child Development in Atlanta states that parents who judge their own self-worth by their children's accomplishments report sadness, negative self-image, and diminished contentment with life in general. According to Peter N. Stearns, provost of George Mason University, parents' anxiety and dissatisfaction with life have markedly increased during the past 20 years because of over involvement in their children's lives.

### **Colleges must use their resources to deal with helicopter parents.**

Colleges are taking steps to mitigate the influence of helicopter parents. Some are holding extra parental orientation sessions, some are hiring staff members to field parents' phone calls and emails, and some are employing "bouncers" to keep parents at bay. All of these plans require monetary resources, and parents will end up financing them through increased tuition costs.

### **How Can You Help Without Hovering?**

Of course, it's never too late to plant your feet firmly on the ground. Here are some suggestions to help you distance yourself while fostering independence in your child:

#### **What can you do to Help you Child take Command...**

- 1. Let your child call you.**

Avoid the temptation to phone every day. When your child does call, listen and give appropriate input, but refrain from decision making. Also, encourage your child to try

to solve problems on his own before dialing home. Ultimately, this will help your child to develop self-confidence and self-management skills.

**2. Stay out of roommates, social, and grading disputes.**

Help your child learn to be a strong self-advocate. If you rush to the rescue at every turn, your child will have difficulty taking responsibility in the future. Growing up can be tough, but if you try to eliminate any discomfort or conflict, your child will have trouble functioning as an adult.

**3. Take a coaching role in the area of finance**

Parents certainly want to make sure their children graduate in four years, and navigating college finances can be daunting for students. However, parents miss an opportunity to teach kids fiscal responsibility if they take total control of all economic matters. Working together to plan and budget is your best bet.

**4. Engage in activities that are personally rewarding.**

Parents who have interests of their own will find themselves less invested in their children's happiness. This is not to say that you should not care if your child is unhappy. However, if you are content with your own life, you can handle your child's disappointments in stride and be an invaluable resource.

**5. Be aware of the difference between helpful involvement and unproductive hovering.**

When your child has experienced emotional or physical trauma, step in.

If you notice disturbing behavior or personality changes, step in.

If collegiate foul-ups are threatening your child's education, step in.

Otherwise, step back and let your child grow into a responsible, independent adult.