



[Don't Hover, Mom: "Helicoptering" Isn't Effective Parenting](#)

As parents, we want to do all we can to protect our children and encourage them to grow up to be strong, self-assured and self-confident individuals who can make wise choices in an increasingly complex world. Somewhere along the line, however, many parents — especially mothers — veer toward being much more overprotective than is actually healthy for their children. These are the so-called “helicopter” moms. But the advice from mental health experts is that “helicoptering”— hovering over your children — isn't effective parenting.

What's Wrong With Being A “Helicopter” Mom?

With the balance between being careful and overprotective often tough to discern, especially if you're in the middle of conflicting situations or caught up in the emotion of parenting at a particularly difficult time, it's not always easy to know the right way to go.

In an [article](#) originally published in Univision, [Mark Burdick, PhD](#), a clinical psychologist in the UK, explained that both men and women can be part of the group of “helicopter” parents. “Initially the idea referred to those involved in the academic life of their children, but today the term encompasses those who watch their children in all walks of life: friends, family and school,” Dr. Burdick says.

Another psychologist quoted in the article, Robert Epstein, PhD, said that being a “helicopter” mom may give the mother a sense of security, but it's a bad idea. Alec Miller, PsyD, Montefiore Medical Center's head of the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychology echoes this sentiment, saying that being overprotective of children deprives them of the challenge of being able to solve problems.

Instead of looking for solutions themselves, they wind up thinking their parents are the only solution. This leads to increasing dependency and intolerance to frustration.

“Helicopter moms can unknowingly teach learned helplessness to their children,” says [Anita Gadhia-Smith, PhD](#), psychotherapist and best-selling author of [Live and Love Each Day](#) and [From Addiction to Recovery](#). “We learn through trial and error, and most importantly, through our mistakes. A toddler learns to walk by falling down many times and then finally learning to stand on his own two feet. We

learn to catch a ball by missing it and then learning how to adapt ourselves in order to catch it. Children develop a sense of agency, autonomy, confidence, and competence through the process of experiencing both success and failure, but the setbacks are what teach the most.”

According to Dr. Miller, “Children learn by experiment, and thanks to errors develop their creativity. While moms can protect them from certain dangers, it is dealing with everyday difficulties which will give them confidence.”

Dr. Gadhia-Smith couldn’t agree more. “Humans are self-correcting machines, who can often grow strong and independent, and find their way if they have the space to do so. Helicopter parents keep the child in a dependent position, which can lead to despair, dysphasia, passivity, and dependency. These are uncomfortable feelings to carry, and can result in greater vulnerability to substance abuse and mental health issues,” she says. “If you are used to everything being done for you and handed to you, why would you put up with any uncomfortable feelings, when a drink or drug can take them away in a minute?”

The Difference Between Caring And Overprotective Parenting

Learning to strike just the right balance between being a caring mom or one that’s overprotective isn’t always easy, say the experts, but it’s doable.

“If parents can help children to build their own self esteem by doing less for them, and helping them learn how to do more for themselves, children will develop greater self-esteem and confidence,” Gadhia-Smith says. “This may involve letting them make some mistakes and not always being on top. In our competitive society, parents sometimes teach their children that being number one is what matters most, regardless of how you got there.”

Miller suggests that “helicopter” moms “begin by becoming aware of your impulse to rescue, and think better about the short- and long-term for your children,” he says.

“The concept of earning what you want in life is central to the ability to survive, succeed and thrive,” Gadhia-Smith says. “Let’s back off and allow our children the space to learn how to live their own lives. They need to strive in order to thrive.”

By Suzanne Kane