

# Impacts of Helicopter Parenting on Children

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### Abstract

Helicopter parenting, the phenomenon of over-involved parents hovering like helicopters over their children's heads, has raised serious concerns about how children are raised and the influence on their characteristic, academic performance and abilities. This paper evaluates the overall impact of helicopter parenting by analyzing the positive and negative influences on children and by comparing it to other parenting styles-authoritative parenting, permissive parenting, and authoritarian parenting. The paper concludes that while there may be some partial benefits in the academic realm, helicopter parenting is detrimental to the mental and social development of children.

## Impact of Helicopter Parenting on Children

Parents are the first teachers of children. A good parenting style can affect children significantly in their academic success, emotional and social development, and the ability of independence. Developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind indicated three main parenting styles which are authoritative parenting, permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting. Helicopter parenting is a new and controversial parenting style: Some people think this parenting style can give children enough care and love, but others think that it has more negative effect on children. Thus, it warrants further research. My research questions are: what are helicopter parents, how does helicopter parenting compare to other parenting styles, and how does it affect the different aspects of a child's development.

This paper examines the definition, specific behaviors of helicopter parenting, and its influence upon children. Next, it will introduce other parenting styles and compare those styles to helicopter parenting style. From researching the effects of the three parenting styles, we can extrapolate from that research to predict the impact of helicopter parenting. The comparison will give a result that if helicopter parenting is instructive for children.

### **Helicopter Parenting**

The concept of helicopter parenting first appeared in 1969, and the educator Dr. Ginott mentioned it in his book "Between Parent and Teenager." He described

helicopter parents as “Mother hovers over me like a helicopter.” Helicopter parenting is a term which began to be widely used in early 2000s because it was the most common parenting styles of generation X parents. According to Van Ingen et al., “Baby boomer parents highly monitor their adult children with the extensive resources they have at their disposal,” (8). Helicopter parents are the parents who give their children too much protection and are deeply involved in their education and daily life. They hover over their children like helicopters and monitor closely their behavior. These parents get involved in their children’s life and clear all obstacles, and this could have a negative influence on their children because they never learn to face challenges. For example, if their children fight with classmates, they will explain the reason of the fight to teacher instead of the children and make sure that their children won’t be punished. In this case, the parents who are not helicopter parents will let their children to solve it. They always have a stronger willingness to ensure their child’s success than other parents (Hiltz).

## **Behavior**

Helicopter parents prefer to be involved in all things that happen in their children’s school and community.

In school, these parents give lots of help and suggestions so that teachers can pay more attention to their children. They go to school almost every week in order to know if their children is doing well in school, and they pick up the children every day. They also send their children to cram school in their spare time either because they are worried about their children falling behind or want their children to get ahead of others.

They highly value grades. If the helicopter parents' children forget to bring homework to school, they may sacrifice their work time to drive back home for the homework. They are frequently voluntary to help with homework and school work. They attend various activities with their child, and they ask teachers for conferences as much as possible (Julie). Helicopter parents usually insist their children to be outstanding in academic.

In daily life, helicopter parents take care of their child from many aspects. They keep giving exact directions to their child such as "what to play with, how to play with a toy, how to clean up and being too strict or demanding" (Risks of Helicopter Parenting). Some parents even wash their child's clothes after the child enter college. They don't want their child to fail or suffer consequences so that the child can focus on his or her school work and prepare for exam. From what brand of shoes to wear, to whom they will marry, many helicopter parents have planned their child's entire life. Those parents may feel anxious when children attend extracurricular activities. When the children come home, they ask about everything. They make all decisions and choices that can give their children a successful life without challenges and obstacles, so the children do not need to worry about decisions, dreams or even life.

What is the impact of all of this helicopter parenting? Helicopter parenting style is a double-edged sword. Parenting styles can affect significantly children's mindsets. On the one hand, if parents can use this parenting style well, the influence on children will improve their academic achievement and the ability of living independently.

## **Positive Effects**

Most of helicopter parents want to have a good relationship with teachers. In a way, this relationship can improve the quality of school's education. Because most helicopter parents are good at using information from social media to judge if a school is proper, the schools pay high attention to those parents' opinions. In a way, these parents give some pressure to schools and teachers so that it can encourage the school to provide better education sources to students. All school administrators and workers will have the accountability to do better. If they know how to take advantage of helicopter parents' assistance, the academic achievement of students will be improved (Hiltz). They also can have a profitable relationship with teachers. In addition, helicopter parenting can reduce separation anxiety because those parents "hover" above their children everyday. They have great awareness of their children such as characteristic, confidence and abilities. Children will get lots of attention and dedication from their parents. In the article "Psychological development and educational problems of left-behind children in rural China," Xiaojun Sun indicated that the left-behind children--the children who are left behind in rural China--have lower life satisfaction, lower self-esteem and higher depression. In contrast, helicopter parenting style promotes the psychological development of children at their earlier stage.

### **Negative Effects**

Helicopter parents are over-involved in children's life which brings the issues that the children don't know how to think, how to live alone, and even how to work. This parenting style may stifle the space for children to grow freely, and it is not beneficial for

developing their independence and sociality. A boy or girl who grows up with helicopter parents often suffer a lot as he or she is adjusting in school and social environments, and he or she may have bad relationship with his parents (Risks of Helicopter Parenting). The child doesn't know the taste of failure, and once he or she fails, he or she will struggle a lot with self-esteem. The child gives up easily because he or she doesn't want to work hard (Weber). Poor emotional and behavioral regulation are the weakness of a child growing up with helicopter parents which can bring many challenges after he works.

The helicopter parenting style affects children in four aspects: abilities, academic performance, characteristic and interpersonal relationship.

### *Abilities*

The over-involving parents reduce children's social skills and independence. Their children are "less able to deal with the demands of growing up" especially after they enter into society (Risks of Helicopter Parenting). Once those children get rid of their parents' protection, they are hard to adjust in "new" environment because they lost the abilities to solve problems. In childhood, those children who grow up with helicopter parents always follow their parents' instruction with no rejection. As time passes, they have a lack of self-awareness because they do not know what their virtue is. Dependence and inferiority make those children be short of creativity and decision making skills. They cannot make decisions by themselves because they are already used to depending on their parents' decisions. They also cannot experience the

consequences of their decision if their parents are not hands-off. For example, if a boy commits traffic offences, and his helicopter parents help dealing with the accident, he would not realize how serious the accident is. He probably will commit another traffic offences and do not care about the consequences. Additionally, a long period of inferiority will lower their self-efficacy and affect their mental health causing anxiety and depression.

### *Academic Performance*

Continuous pressure from parents and schools will increase children's mental and physical burden. Helicopter parents have strong desire that their children be ahead of others, so they contact with teachers and ask them how their children can improve their grade. They send their children to cram school so that they may improve academic performance and make their children more outstanding than other classmates. Although their decisions are not based on their children's willing, they still insist on following their mind. The children who grow up with helicopter parents tend to dislike studying and their parents over time. When they are forced to study and sacrifice their spare time to do something that violates their willing, they will more likely hate their parents and learning which negatively affects their academic performance in the end.

### *Characteristics*

Different parenting styles have different influence on children's characteristics. There are two kinds of helicopter parents which are strict and doting parents.

If the parents are too strict to their children, their children will become more inferior, insecure and unconfident. The strict parents command and criticize their children all the time in all aspects in daily life and school. What they do increases the mental pressure of their children. Most of the children who have strict parents consider that their parents are always dissatisfied about their children so that they become less confident.

If the parents are too doting, their children will be very arrogant and become fixed mindset. The doting parents follow their children's willing. They buy everything that their children want and take them everywhere they wish. After their children start college life, they help with carrying luggage, checking in and cleaning the dormitory if their children do not want to do these things by their own self. The children who grow up with doting parents never hear from other's opinion because they think they are better than anyone around them. Besides, those helicopter parents always praise their children whether they are right or wrong. This behavior makes children become fixed mindset (Dweck). In the article "Brainology Transforming Students' Motivation To Learn," Carlos Dweck states that students with fixed mindset believe that their intelligence is fixed, and they cannot change it whether they put effort on it (Dweck). Fixed mindset demoralizes students which makes them lose confidence. Dweck also indicates that fixed mindset "dampened student's motivation to learn, made them afraid of effort, and made them want to quit after a setback." The students with fixed mindset are afraid of facing challenges and learning new things.

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### *Interpersonal Relationship*

Helicopter parents always help their children to argue with others if the children have a fight. This behavior affects children's interpersonal skills. The children do not know how to communicate or resolve arguments with others. Furthermore, an appropriate interpersonal skill is that people need to consider others' feeling, but the children of helicopter parents do not have the opportunity to develop that skill because their parents will help them to resolve problems instead of the children. If the children are very haughty, they do not care about friends' suggestions and moods. The relationship among children and parents will also be affected. Helicopter parents keep pressure on children, and they don't care if their children do not like this parenting style. As time passes, the children will be more rebellious, and the relationship will become poorer.

Helicopter parenting has a crucial influence on children's development. However, it is not very normative to judge if this parenting style is instructive for children. By comparing helicopter parenting to other parenting styles, the result will be more standard.

### **Other Parenting Styles**

Baumrind mentioned three main parenting styles: authoritative parenting, permissive parenting, and authoritarian parenting. In Samiullah Sarwar's article "Influence of Parenting Style on Children's Behaviour," he concluded that

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demandingness and responsiveness are the two most important factors to explain those parenting styles (Sarwar, 230).

### *Authoritative Parenting*

Authoritative parenting is the best parenting style for children. It has high demandingness and responsiveness (Sarwar, 230). The authoritative parents guide their children in a proper way in that they respect and encourage their children. Sarwar pointed that “these parents encourage verbal give-and-take, express reasoning behind rules and use power, reason, and shaping to strengthen objectives,” (230). The children who grow up with authoritative parents have higher academic performance and social skills because they have already built confidence from their parents. Parvathy Varma showed that authoritative parenting helps children have better self-regulation, academic adjustment and psychological well-being in her article “The Influence of Parenting Styles” (16). Children can have better and more comprehensive development with authoritative parents.

### *Permissive Parenting*

Permissive parenting is the parents who have high responsiveness but low demandingness (Sarwar, 232). They are warm and responsible, but they are too indulgent and lenient. Permissive parents prefer few rules or no rules to their children. However, because these parents are too permissive, they may not teach their children some social skills for independence. They don’t have enough responsibility and the

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ability to cooperate with others. Lack of guidance and parental involvement will result in impulsive behavior, violence and egocentricity. In the article “Helicopters, Lawn Mowers or Down-to-Earth Parents? What Works Best for Higher Education,” the author Karen Gross shows the importance of the parental involvement. He says, “the absence of parental involvement leads to increased high school dropout rates and failure of lower income students to progress to and through college.”

### *Authoritarian Parenting*

The authoritarian parents prefer to have a strict control and have high expectations for their children. Sarwar explains that authoritarian parenting style has high demandingness but low responsiveness (230). They have huge desire for their children’s success, but they control their children by giving rules instead of guidance. If their children have mistakes, they will punish the children harshly. These parents lack care and patience, and they seldom give their children options. This parenting style affects children seriously. The children who grow up with authoritarian parents have worse academic performance, lower self-esteem even mental problems. Though these children obey their parents, but they will have a rebellious mentality which may increase the rate of juvenile delinquency.

### **Discussion**

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We can describe these three parenting styles as “just right,” “too soft,” and “too hard.” Compared to these parenting styles, helicopter parenting is between authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting.

Helicopter parents are “too hard” in their demands on their children, and authoritarian parents control their children a lot. Both of the two styles parents have high expectation on their children in academic performance and jobs. They are over-involved in their children’s life and study, and they think it is the best way to have a better outcome. However, Bergen and Bressler conclude that “over-parenting is crippling children” in their article (4). Most children who grow up with helicopter parents or authoritarian parents have mental problems because they cannot express their feeling to their parents. Their parents do not care about their children’s thoughts, and they always blame their children by making mistake so that the children are afraid to talk with their parents.

Helicopter parents who are “too soft” and permissive parents give their children too much freedom. The helicopter parents who are too doting always satisfy their children’s desire. They buy for their children whatever they want and take the children to where they wish. They do not want their children to have negative emotion. Their children can do whatever they want, but this behavior has significant effect on children’s personality. Children of helicopter parents may be more spoiled and dependent because they have not had to do choices or make decisions for themselves and to self-regulate. Children of permissive parents may have less impulse control and feel insecure because they do not have rules to guide them. The common grounds of the

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children from helicopter parents and permissive parents are most of them have a strong dependence on their parents and poor interpersonal relationship with others. They will be very supercilious and not respectful to others which makes them suffer losses after they live without their parents.

### **Conclusion**

The effect of parenting style has a huge impact on children. After we analyze the behavior and effects of helicopter parenting, and compare it to other parenting styles, we can give a conclusion that helicopter parenting style is not conducive to children developing a comprehensive and mature mind. It limits children from their academic performance to characteristic. The children who are instructed by helicopter parents usually “have a tougher time adjusting in school and social environments” (Risk of Helicopter Parenting). These children will have poor academic performance and social skills which give them many challenges. However, everything has its advantages and disadvantages. Helicopter parents can improve the quality of school if they are not over-involved in school work, and they can give children enough care which promotes the psychological development of children. In China, there is a saying that “take the essence and discard the dregs,” which means make good use of the advantages and improve the disadvantages, and it will have a better outcome not only from children but also parents.

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