

Are you a Helicopter Parent

Hovering over your child can leave a lasting adverse impact on the mind. Akhil Shahani explains how parents can pick between giving them a Growth Mindset or a Fixed Mindset

How many times have you done your child's school project or even paid the neighbourhood aunty to do it? Have you ever called up your friends after school exam results are out, to see how much their child scored only to compare it with your own? Have you made sure that no hour of your child's day is wasted in playing or daydreaming? Are you part of the WhatsApp group created by the school teacher only to get minute by minute feedback of homework and your child's performance.

If you've done any or all the above, you may be a helicopter parent.

WHY DO WE HOVER

After the rise of Tiger moms in Asia, the trend has now shifted to helicopter parenting. The term refers to parents who 'hover' over their child to control their education, extra-curricular activities, free time and even the friends they choose.

Interestingly, these parents grew up in the 80s or 90s and were raised by parents who had a hands-off approach. They were given a lot of time to play with their friends, eat food from street vendors and there was relatively less pressure to score high marks in the exams. Despite enjoying the freedom while growing up, a clear majority of these 'neglected' kids grew up to lead a happy and successful life.

So, what has led to the rise of helicopter parenting? We can easily put the blame on unfound fear of one's child being left behind in the rat race. Most parents feel that unless they help their kids at every step, their parenting

is incomplete. The general perception is that the competition to get into right school, college or get a lucrative job is getting increasingly difficult than it was in the 1990s. So, parents need to work harder. Exploiting this fear are the education companies that offer private coaching classes, structured sports activities, technology tools for better learning, 'how to' books. Most anxious parents are ready to spend a fortune to give an edge to their children.

EXIT GRIT AND CURIOSITY

But the bad news is that overprotectiveness can have an adverse effect. Helicopter parenting could make your child fail in the long term. Several researches have confirmed that the key skills that a child needs to develop for long term success in life

CHANGE YOUR PARENTING STYLE

The key aspect is willing to let your child be. Let them have a lot of free time to play with friends, get involved in sports or just go to a bookshop to browse. Don't expect every activity to be geared towards an achievement. Your child can play football without trying to be part of their school team. S/he can play chess without entering a tournament. Give your child some responsibilities as well. They can help with household chores or tutor their younger siblings. In all cases give them a lot of encouragement and support but leave them to face their own challenges.

Supporting them with love and not fear is the best way for your child to ultimately grow up to be happy and successful.

include grit and curiosity underpinned by a Growth Mindset. Helicopter parenting prevents these traits from developing.

Grit enables a child to face challenges head-on and to keep trying until they succeed. Children with low levels of grit tend to give up easily and are content to stay where they are. The only way to develop grit is to get them involved in challenging scenarios and enable them to look for solutions to overcome. However, helicopter parents will try their best to shield their child from possible failures, like helping with a school project so that it looks perfect instead of letting the child do as per his/her capacity. Children raised by helicopter

parents who have never known failure can be high strung and get adversely affected during an inevitable hardship.

Curiosity encourages a child to keep exploring new things. The world is constantly changing, with new technologies disrupting the markets and forcing people to adapt to remain competitive. Only those with curiosity develop a love for learning that allows them to pick up new capabilities and adapt well in a changed environment. A helicopter parent will limit their child's curiosity by discouraging daydreaming and exploring ideas outside the school curriculum, with the goal of spending all free time in pursuit of high marks in exams. Research has shown that often students who do very well in rote learning driven exams tend to develop a personality that is used to following orders and is not able to think independently.

GROWTH V/S FIXED MINDSET

Developing a Growth Mindset is key to build confidence in your child. This is better than having a Fixed Mindset where you believe your child's intelligence and capabilities are set for life. For example, you could say, "My child is shy, so I will avoid making her talk to new people." A Growth Mindset, on the other hand, is where you believe that all personal capabilities can be developed through focussed hard work. For example, you could say, "My child currently feels uncomfortable speaking to new people. However, I will keep making her meet people until she gets comfortable doing so". You will assure a Fixed Mindset in your child when you tell them that they are not good at doing something and that they should try something else.

Helicopter parenting often leads to kids having higher levels of anxiety, poor coping skills and a tendency to get depressed easily. Assuming you do not want this to happen to your child, you can modify your parenting style.

(The author is an educator and MD of The Shahani Group)



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