

solutions

LETTING GO: A Parent's Challenge

Modern parents are struggling as they try to strike a balance between their own parents' "live and let live" parenting style, and the 21st century approach of managing every single aspect of their children's lives. Research shows that the September 11th tragedy plus the economic crashes in 2000 and 2008, have so heightened anxiety that this generation has become "helicopter parents."

This parental over-involvement has emerged in response to a fierce love of their children and a fear of both real and perceived dangers. To protect their children, parents are running interference whenever their child is faced with a challenge or a disappointment. These parents have lost sight of the fact that many of the negative experiences they are trying to prevent: a lack of confidence, unhappiness, pain, and failure are the very ones that lead to success when these obstacles are overcome. Experts advise us to remember that you can limit risky behavior, but you can't eliminate risk. When parents try to engineer failure out of kids' lives, Lahey says, "kids feel incompetent, incapable, unworthy of trust and utterly dependent. They are, she argues, unprepared when "failures that happen out there in the real world, carry far higher stakes."

Sadly, recent social research is finding that the intent of over-parenting may have backfired. College counselors across the nation are reporting higher rates of general anxiety in this generation's students. These young adults who say they had over-controlling parents have higher levels of depression and anxiety, and reported feeling less satisfied with themselves and their family life. When they receive parental support they didn't ask for, they feel less competent and have less initiative than peers who weren't parented in this way, and they lack a sense of confidence because of it. In addition, researchers are finding

that the inappropriate, anxiety-driven parenting tactics compromise children's autonomy, mastery, and personal growth. As the first generation of over-parented kids continues to graduate into the world, studies now show that youngsters whose parents intervene inappropriately -- offering advice, removing obstacles and solving problems that kids should tackle themselves -- actually wind up as anxious, narcissistic young adults who have trouble coping with the demands of life.

Here are some tips to restore a balance and sanity into the parenting equation:

- **Don't hover** - Children cannot learn if their parents think, speak, act and take full responsibility for them.
- **Don't put your worries onto your child** - Don't look for evidence to confirm your own worst fears. Stop asking, "Are you okay?" "Are you sure?" "Is that too difficult?", or "Are you sure you can handle that?"
- **Don't make your child the center of your universe** - Don't think or worry about your child so much that you avoid thinking about your own life, your own work, or your adult relationships.
- **Don't take it personally if your child doesn't agree with you, or does things differently from you** - Help your child achieve their goals, not yours.
- **Don't focus on your child as a way to avoid dealing with your own struggles.**
- **Foster independence** - your job is to show them how to function in the world, not to function for them.

Resources:

How to Raise Successful Kids-without Over-parenting by Julie Lythcott-Haims

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee by Wendy Mogel

The Price of Privilege by Madeline Levine

The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed by Jessica Lahey

PARENTS MATTER: *From the minute they are born, children begin the long journey towards independence; parents must begin the long journey of letting go!*