

Overparenting Leads to Entitlement, and Allowing Failure Encourages Resilience

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WINCHESTER, England—During the last couple of decades, new types of parents have emerged.

From the anxiously involved helicopter parents to the pushy tiger mums, these differing styles all have one thing in common: They tend to involve overparenting.

Examples of overparenting

This is where parents micromanage their children’s lives—giving them little autonomy, putting too much pressure on them to achieve academic and personal success, while allowing few chances for their children to experience failure and frustration.

- These are the parents who run back to school when their children forget their sports kit, do their homework, and ask others in the parent WhatsApp chat for the homework when their child does not bring it home.
- These parents believe their children are always right. They will confront teachers if the child feels they have been unfairly treated, or will confront other parents if, say, their child is not invited to a party.
- As their children grow, these parents decide which GCSEs (General Certificates of Secondary Education) their children should choose, and do not allow their adolescents to travel on their own because they are afraid they may be kidnapped.
- These parents may well accompany their children to university applicant interviews, or even to job interviews.
- And they are parents who consider themselves their child’s best friend rather than their parent.

The power of failure

While there is no doubt that these parental behaviors are acts of love, the problem is that by making sure that the children never fail an assignment, experience a detention, or the disappointment of not being invited to a party, these parents are not letting them fail. As a result, they are effectively hindering their child’s development.

By learning to overcome failure, children develop resilience. They learn to deal with frustration and to regulate their emotions properly. And it is crucial children develop these skills during childhood to be able to lead successful lives.

Children of all ages

Most of the research on overparenting has focused on how it has affected university students. But the link between overinvolved parents and negative consequences is found when examining children of all ages.

Indeed, preschool and primary school children of overinvolved parents tend to experience high levels of shyness, anxiety and poor peer relations.

When examining adolescents and university students, these negative consequences continue.

For example, 16- to 28-year-old students who reported having helicopter parents were more likely to have low levels of self-efficacy—the trust that people have in their own abilities and skills—and poor relationships with their peers.

In similar research, young people who reported having overinvolved parents experienced higher levels of depression and stress, less satisfaction with life, as well as less ability to regulate their emotions. They also reported a higher sense of entitlement and increased drug use than young people with less involved parents.

Anxiety and stress

overparenting does not have negative consequences only for the children, though. Parents who overparent are more likely to experience high levels of anxiety, stress and regret.

This in turn has negative consequences for their children, who may pick up on their parents' anxiety and make it their own.

This may be one of the reasons why the number of university students struggling with anxiety and depression is at an all-time high. Indeed, a recent poll concluded that one in five university students in the UK suffers from high anxiety levels.

Right type of involvement

So should all parents back off and not get involved in their children's lives? Not quite.

- Research clearly shows that children who have involved parents tend to do better at school and have higher levels of self-esteem and better peer relations than children whose parents are not as involved.
- Children whose parents are warm, loving and have high expectations of them tend to do better than children of cold and undemanding parents.

The difficulty lies in establishing what the right amount of love and demand- ingness is. So the key aspect that researchers are now trying to establish is what the optimal level of parental involvement is.

Teaching them to face problems

There is no doubt that parents want to protect their children and avoid their getting hurt but they also need to consider when that level of protection becomes too much. So next time your child rings from school asking you to bring in their sports kit, think twice before doing it.

Life inevitably brings problems and disappointment. It is better to teach children how to face these issues rather than to solve all their problems for them.

By doing so, parents will help children to develop resilience and the ability to deal with frustration—tools that will allow them to thrive once they leave the parental home.