

Guest Blogger Jenny: Helicopter Parenting: The Blades On The Chopper Go Round & Round

Description



Helicopter Parents: They Hover

There's been a lot written lately about extreme parenting. I'm not talking about the home schooling, pioneer garb wearing, technology shunning extreme, I'm talking about extreme (disguised as concerned) that's sinking into the general culture, indeed even into the private school culture.

Take, for instance, the idea of attachment parenting. That's when you have the baby and instantly strap it to you in a sling, feed it on demand, and share every moment with it. In other words, you're a prisoner of your infant. While I can see how this constant supervision might work in, say, a tribe or multi-generational household (in which adults trade off the necessary responsibility of a baby), it seems enormously impractical in modern life. As Erica Jong wrote recently in an article called "Mother Madness" in the Wall Street Journal: "How you do this (attachment parenting) and earn the money to keep her is rarely discussed." Not to mention how you keep your sanity.

You know what the natural offshoot of attachment parenting is? The helicopter parent. The constant control, extreme attentiveness, and obsessive care bordering on fatal neurosis are all reminiscent of attachment parenting. Children are treated like delicate hothouse orchids that must be tended round the clock lest they keel over (or perhaps escape). These are parents who plan every minute and activity for their children and never let them do anything alone.

Sometimes I get the feeling that some of the kids in Anna's class have never been separated from their parents. This spring, there's an overnight field trip to Sacramento planned, in order to learn about state government (these kids have spent plenty of time on the 405; now it's time to learn

about the other gridlock). When it was first mentioned at a parents'™ night, parents were informed that, if they wanted to go on the Sacramento trip, they must first volunteer for two regular field trips. I was mystified. Was this a way to deter parents from volunteering? Because I knew one thing for sure: I had NO interest in going to Sacramento for an overnight with a bunch of kids.

I was wrong, of course. It wasn't a deterrent; just a way to ensure that they had parents for the regular field trips, too. Because, you see, it turns out I'm in the minority. What I view as an opportunity for an adult evening, (while my child is in the best possible hands) is viewed by helicopter parents as an unacceptable lack of control. There are plenty of parents clamoring for the opportunity to chaperone an out of town overnight. Plenty.

The really funny thing about these private school helicopter parents is that private school, for the most part, makes helicoptering redundant. Private schools try to anticipate students'™ needs. The institutions are nurturing and attentive. Expectations and requirements are clearly indicated, and performance is rewarded. In the private school sphere, the helicopter parent is a mere annoyance: a pesky mosquito instead of a diligently patrolling machine.

At my daughter's™ school, this dynamic is particularly obvious. Mirman is extremely child focused. While the school might want my money for annual giving or my time for volunteer work, it really doesn't want to hear from me otherwise. Much of the time, when dealing with the teaching staff, I feel gently humored. Sure, my kid might be bright, but who's to say I'm not a blithering idiot. And don't think I resent the school's™ attitude; I actually appreciate and applaud it. Because let's face it: I'm not qualified to educate my child, and I probably shouldn't be allowed to weigh in on it that often. That's what the school gets paid to do.

As I watch these parents circle their children, examine their every expression, scrutinize their friendships and monitor their meals, I think about my daughter's™ choice (and thus the choice of many of her friends) of reading material. Books like Harry Potter, The Time Trilogy, The Narnia Chronicles, The Hunger Games, Rick Riordan novels, His Dark Materials, and many others all have parents who are dead, absent, distracted, or simply not of any real importance to the plot. The child protagonists in these books survive by their wits and ingenuity, not by depending on adults. This is what kids crave. And this is what their helicopter parents, who want to give them everything, will never give them.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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