

Extra love and support doesn't make up for being a helicopter parent

1 June 2015



BYU employees Dennis and Marianne Cutchins are not helicopter parents, but here is their attempt at portraying it.

It's time for helicopter parents to land and stay grounded.

New research by professors at Brigham Young University revealed that parental warmth cannot neutralize the consequences of [helicopter parenting](#). Additionally, a lack of warmth makes the negative effects worse.

Such negative effects include lower self-worth and higher risk behavior, such as binge drinking.

"From our past work, we thought there might be something positive about helicopter parenting under certain conditions, but we're just not finding it," study author Larry Nelson said.

The study, published in *Emerging Adulthood*, is a follow-up to 2012 research on helicopter parenting that found the children of helicopter parents are less engaged in school. Now they've found that helicopter parenting combined with an absence of parental warmth is especially detrimental to young

adults' well-being.

Researchers defined helicopter parenting as parents' over-involvement in the lives of their children. This includes making important decisions for them, solving their problems and intervening in their children's conflicts. Warmth is measured by parental availability to talk and spend time together.

Nelson and Padilla-Walker examined data from 438 undergraduate students in four universities nationwide (not including Brigham Young University). The students self-reported on their parents' controlling behavior and warmth, then on their own self-esteem, risk behaviors and academics.

Results showed that the lack of warmth intensifies both the decrease in self-worth and increase in risk behaviors in the young-adult children of helicopter parents. High levels of parental warmth reduced the [negative effects](#), but did not eliminate them completely.

The findings suggest that loving parents can't justify their helicoptering tendencies; too much control is too much, no matter the parents' affection and support.

"Overall, stepping in and doing for a child what the child developmentally should be doing for him or herself, is negative," Nelson said. "Regardless of the form of control, it's harmful at this time period."

The authors note that helicopter parenting is relatively uncommon and not as damaging as forms of control that are harsh, punitive or manipulative.

Nelson warned that helicopter parents shouldn't overcompensate by removing themselves completely from their children's lives. Young adults deserve more autonomy, but still need parental support.

"Lack of control does not mean lack of involvement, warmth and support," Nelson said.

More information: *Emerging Adulthood*,
eas.sagepub.com/content/early/.../96815576458.abstract

Provided by Brigham Young University

APA citation: Extra love and support doesn't make up for being a helicopter parent (2015, June 1)
retrieved 30 April 2021 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-extra-doesnt-helicopter-parent.html>

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