

Confessions of a Recovering Helicopter Parent

By Roger Marsh

If you're the parent of teen or a pre-teenager, you are a part of one of the most "involved" groups of parents ever. That's due to the fact that the children known as the Millennial Generation (born in 1982 or later) are the most "wanted" kids in American history.

I know how you feel. When my wife and I learned that we were expecting, I was thrilled and terrified at the same time. But, like most young dads-to-be of that era, I was *determined* to be a lot more involved in the lives of my children than my own father was.

I speak for many in my generation by saying this. Those of us "Generation X" parents (born in the 1960's) delayed marriage until we found "the right one" to marry...then we made certain we were "ready to have kids" before we became parents. However, once we *did* decide that it was "time" for the little ones to arrive, we didn't just casually enter the parenting season – we dove in head first!

We spent hours reading parenting books and watching parenting videos during the months leading up to birth. Both Mom and Dad went to every pre-natal appointment with the obstetrician. The video camera was well-positioned in the delivery room as our newborn "miracles" were born. And then...we *really* got involved in our children's lives.

We signed our kids up for *everything* – soccer, ballet, Mommy and Me. There didn't seem to be a moment when at least *one* parent was interacting with our children during virtually every waking hour of each day. We were working together with them on school projects – and sometimes it seemed as if *we* were doing more of their homework than *they* were! If we were the generation who felt disconnected from our own parents, we were certainly *not* going to let that happen with our own kids. (To paraphrase one of my favorite lines from the movie, *Field of Dreams*, my wife and I "were the West Coast distributors of *involved*.")

But maybe we went a bit too far. In the 1980's, psychologist John Rosemond identified that perhaps it was possible for us parents to become *too* involved in the lives of our children. He coined the phrase "helicopter parent" to describe the mom or dad who was so preoccupied with his or her child's life that they were constantly "hovering" over their youngster. His point was simple yet profound: while it's true that more parental involvement in a child's life will certainly keep them from feeling neglected, it *is* possible to have "too much of a good thing."

Today, my "babies" aren't so little any more. Two of them are in college and the third is about to enter high school. So, with the wisdom of nearly 20 years of "hovering" behind me, I believe I have *finally* given myself permission to enter into "recovery" for my

tendencies to be a “helicopter parent.” As a result, I must confess a few things about my soon-to-be former ways:

- I confess that I *enjoy* sleeping in past 6AM on Saturday mornings...because I didn't volunteer to be “field set-up guy” for the local soccer region;
- I confess that it's been a bit of a struggle to find topics to discuss with my kids that *don't* begin, “So, how was practice?” or “What time is your concert?”
- I confess that it's somewhat of a relief to head home from work on a weeknight and *not* have to worry about whether my son did his homework – because that's *his* responsibility and not *mine* (after all – *I* have already finished the 8th grade . . . no need to have to relive those memories yet again ☺);
- I confess that I enjoy having friendships with other couples that are based on how the four of us get along as friends (rather than the fact that we only “hang out” because our *kids* are in the same musical group at school);
- I confess that I'm really glad that our kids will hang out at some *other* family's house occasionally;
- I confess that I actually enjoy *not* knowing every single detail about every single thing that's going on in the lives of my children (I'm simply too old to keep up with “who's going out with whom” and “who's flunking AP Calculus”)

I also confess that, in backing off my stance as a “helicopter parent,” I'm actually *helping* myself achieve the ultimate goal of parenting. It's not about raising “happy kids” – it's about raising them to become *responsible adults*. That process involves allowing them to move from *dependence* on me to *independence*. They need a certain measure of room to grow to accomplish that task. And they certainly don't need a *helicopter parent* “kicking up dust” all around them while that's taking place.

So, these days, I'm settling into my role as a caring life-coach for my children rather than a swarming “helicopter parent.” It's not always easy – in fact, some days feel downright uncomfortable. But in the end, I'm trusting God that He'll continue to extend to me the same grace as a parent that He already does to me as His child.

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