**How to Stop Worrying and Avoid Helicopter Parenting: Don’t Do These 6 Things**

“When I was young, my mom and dad sent us out to play in the morning in our neighborhood, and we didn’t come home until dinner time,” a friend said to me recently. “But times have changed. I feel like I must keep constant tabs on my kids. I wish they could have the kind of childhood I did, but what can I do? I need to make sure they’re safe.”

*Here’s the truth: When you expect something, you will find it. And when you try to fix what you worry about, you inadvertently create it.*

Times *have* changed, and of course we all want to protect our kids and make sure they’re safe and healthy. Where this can become problematic is when parents attempt to remove obstacles in their child’s path or try to ensure that their kids will never experience pain, disappointment or discomfort. Enter the helicopter parent.

What is at the heart of most helicopter parenting? Anxiety—about our kids’ safety, happiness, and ability to navigate in the world. Many of us spend a large percentage of our time second guessing every move we make as parents. Our minds cause us to project our worst fears onto our children – we love them so much and we want to protect them from any harm. Over time, we can become hyper vigilant for any signs of trouble to cut it off at the pass. This constant vigilance can become larger-than-life, though, because we start imagining and projecting things we shouldn’t on to our kids.

Get instant parenting help for angry outbursts, consequences, disrespect, oppositional defiant disorder or physical abuse. Receive parenting articles, podcasts, exclusive discounts and more!

If our kids are unhappy, we might overreact and automatically try to make them feel okay. If they are uncertain, we may mistake this for deep insecurity and shower them with praise and assurance. We “futurize” negative outcomes when our imaginations get activated. In fact, it’s been proven that our brains are wired in a way that makes negatives stick like Velcro, while the positives slide off like Teflon. Worry kicks in. “Is my kid really okay? Is he too aggressive, too quiet, too loud, too tall, too short? Is he showing signs of insecurity? Is he acting like my brother, who didn’t turn out so well? Do I need to give my daughter more attention since I didn’t get enough as a child?”

Listen, none of us wants to “screw up” our kids…but the absolute surest way to do just that is to constantly worry about screwing them up! That is the frustrating irony. We want to do it all right, but sometimes our insecurity about getting it all wrong leads to hovering and tracking our kids for the first signs of expected trouble. Here’s the truth: When you expect something, you will find it. And when you try to fix what you worry about, you inadvertently create it. This is a self -fulfilling prophecy in action, and it’s exactly what leads kids to feel self-conscious and insecure about themselves. You see, children often have the belief that, “If my parent is worrying about me, then there must be something about me to be worried about!”

**The “Worried-Driven Cycle”**

The “Worried-Driven Cycle” is the way anxiety moves through relationships. Here’s a scenario to explain how the “Worried – Driven Cycle” can go with a parent and child:

Karen is the mom of two boys. She worries about screwing them up and having them grow up to be insecure. She is especially anxious about her 15-year-old son, Jack, who is defiant, acts out and has problems with authority.

She nervously “over-focuses” on Jack (and always has) and looks for signs of his insecurity and low self-esteem. Karen is hyper vigilant for any sign that he’s not okay—and then when she feels her fears are confirmed, she either tiptoes around him, or tries to fix things for him.

After years of this, Jack has come to rely on her focus and attentiveness. Even though he would never say so, he is both anxious about her concern about him and reliant on her constant attention and focus.

As a teen, Jack has become anxious about himself and “other- focused”—reliant on attention and focus from others for his sense of worth—the pattern he learned from his relationship with his parents. He comes to need “other validation” in order to feel good about himself in all of his relationships and feels insecure if he doesn’t get it. This is exactly what his parent feared would occur and tried desperately to prevent by hovering, doing too much and removing obstacles from his path.

What can we learn from this scenario? Stop looking for evidence to confirm your worries. Realize that your worrying gets in your child’s way.

**6 Steps to Avoid Over-worrying and Helicopter Parenting**

Here are 6 DON’Ts when it comes to over-worrying, over-focusing on your child and being a helicopter parent:

**1. Don’t hover over your child.** Don’t tie your 5-year-old’s shoes when she can tie her own or dress her when she can dress herself. Avoid hovering and holding her back from normal “risks” a child would take at her age level. It’s also not a good idea to talk to her teachers incessantly or answer all your child’s questions so she doesn’t have to think of answers for herself. If she hesitates to make her own decisions, try not to jump in and do it for her—let her reason it out on her own if she can. Allow her to feel discomfort or pain; it’s part of growing up. Don’t prevent her from struggling or rescue her from life’s hardships. Kids can’t learn if their parents are always doing it for them.

**2. Don’t put your worry on your child’s back.** Don’t focus on your child morning, noon and night, imagining all the worst outcomes. Let go of negative thoughts about her future, like, “What if she doesn’t amount to anything when she grows up? Is her shyness a sign of her lack of confidence?” Don’t interrogate her when you get anxious, and keep asking, “Are you okay? ““Are you sure?” Or “That looks difficult. Are you sure you can handle that?” Or “Do you have anyone to play with at recess? Who?” Don’t look for evidence to confirm your worst fears about your child.

**3. Don’t make your child the center of your universe.** Don’t try to get all your emotional needs met by your child. If you’re there at his beck-and-call and over-functioning for him (in other words, doing for him what he can do for himself), he’ll have a hard time functioning on his own in the world. Most importantly, don’t allow his achievements to determine your self-worth and validation as a parent.

**4. Don’t label your child.** Negatively (or even positively) labeling your child is not a good idea, because it can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, or push her into a box that isn’t right for her. Don’t remind one of your kids that she is “the pretty one” or “the funny one” or “the lazy one” or “the one who will turn out just like Dad.” Avoid saying, “You never…” or “You always…” Let go of deciding to know who your child is or will become; nobody knows yet, not even your child. Allow yourself to imagine other possibilities. The bottom line is that words are powerful, so don’t make negative predictions about what your child will become.

**5. Don’t take it personally if your child doesn’t agree with you or does things differently from you.** If you get in your child’s head, he won’t be able to hear his own thoughts and beliefs. Even if he thinks differently than you, don’t argue with him over it—instead, invite him to tell you more. Don’t shut him down when he has ideas or opinions that are different from the ones you would like him to have or insist on having the last word. And finally, try not to take things personally if he chooses a different path in life than the one you thought he would take.

**6. Don’t focus on your child as a way of not having to deal with your own struggles.** This is a big one and can be very hard for parents. Try not to get so involved in your child’s life that you neglect your own. Don’t think or worry about your child so much that you avoid thinking about your own life, your work or your adult relationships. What I often say to parents is, “Don’t focus so much on taking care of your child’s garden that you forget to tend to your own.”

What’s a better approach? Let your child experience the consequences of his actions. Let go of constant worry as a parent and realize you can’t control everything your kids do—you can only respond to how they behave. Try to see their strengths as well as their struggles. You can avoid over-worrying and being a helicopter parent if you work on developing strong relationships with your children by getting to know them for who they are. Allow them to make their own mistakes, face their own consequences, and solve their own problems. This will allow you to let go of hovering, doing too much for your kids and worrying about them all the time, and best of all, it will help you become a calmer, more peaceful parent.