Experts Say Parents Shouldn't Inhibit Children's Decision Making

An ongoing nationwide study finds that up to 60 percent of college parents are so-called "helicopter parents" -- a generation of mothers and fathers who hover over their children from the cradle to college.

The team of researchers in the University of Texas at Austin study also interviewed hundreds of people on more than 150 college campuses. But, college resident advisors like Jonathan Vinters of Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, Ohio, don't need a study to tell them how closely parents can hover.

"They call me they complain. They call my supervisor and complain," he said.

According to the study's co-author, Jim Settle, some decisions are never too small for such piloting parents.

"Minor roommate disputes, whether or not the room is clean or dirty, whether one roommate takes another roommate's ramen noodles" can be the disputes helicopter parents get involved in, said Settle, who also is vice president of student affairs at Shawnee State University.

**What Kind of Helicopter Parent Are You?**

During the research, Settle found distinctive types of hovering parents.

The "black hawk parent" is typically angry, abusive and would go straight to the president's office no matter how minor the concern. The "toxic parent" is paranoid enough to log on to their child's online social networking pages as their child to research friends and roommates.

Settle has heard of parents taking technology to the extreme.

"A student reported his parents installed a nanny cam on his computer," he said, "so the parents were able to watch their son 24 hours a day."

But technology driven parents aren't the only type of helicopter parents.

The "safety expert" always is anxious over school security measures and is eager to form emergency plans for his or her child. Then the "consumer advocate" always is ready to negotiate discounted tuition and fees, while the "traffic and rescue parent" swoops in at the first hint of trouble, landing on campus with supplies and support.

Self-proclaimed helicopter mother Stacey Roig is in constant contact with her son at Xavier University and her daughter in Tennessee and sees herself as a traffic and rescue parent.

She obtained log-ons and passwords from her children so she could track their financial record and grades.

"I mean, this is a financial investment for my husband and I," she said. "College is not inexpensive, and it's getting higher and higher all the time."
While some see the different types of helicopter parents as overbearing and doing a disservice to children, some parents proudly express their place as hovering parents.

Helicopter mom Melody Scott said she speaks with her 19-year-old daughter at Cornell University every day.

Scott describes herself as a mixture between a black hawk and safety expert.

She admitted to sending an e-mail to the head of the dining hall to complain about the amount of salt in the chicken. Despite the fact her daughter was perturbed, Scott said she thought it was the right thing to do.

Scott and Roig said they respect their children's privacy and would never snoop into their social lives.

Experts said parents must be careful.

"To me, the distinction between healthy helicopter and unhealthy helicopter is the degree to which you really interfere with your kids' decision making," said Sue Shellenbarger of the Wall Street Journal. "The key is: Are you a coach on the sidelines or are you in there playing center on the field?"

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