

The Contradiction of the Negligent 'Helicopter Parent'

In any discussion of modern child-rearing methods, you will inevitably hear the pejorative nickname "helicopter parents." This denotes mothers and fathers who supposedly smother and cosset their offspring. These kids will grow up to be "snowflakes" who need "safe spaces" to protect them from anything disagreeable in life.

My children are currently ages three and five. As a result, I spend a lot of time around other families. In my experience, there is a great deal of truth to the "helicopter parent" stereotype. However, it's hardly the full story.

The flip side of "helicopter parenting" is the almost shocking level of neglect those same parents occasionally show their kids. These parents can be extremely overbearing in certain areas, often insignificant ones. At the same time, they are indifferent towards other, more important parts of their children's upbringing.

A few months ago, I read Kevin D. Williamson's new book [*The Smallest Minority*](#). I was struck by his use of the phrase "anarcho-tyranny" which he defines as "the feckless democratic mode in which genuine crime and violence go unpoliced while the law-abiding are subjected to a regime of ever more intrusive regulation." I keep thinking back on this concept when I observe modern parenting.

Let's start with some examples of the "anarchical" side of parenting. Last year, I was considering sending my children to a certain local school. I knew a mom whose son attended there so I figured I'd get her input. I started by asking, "What does he do on a typical school day?" She gave a half-shrug and said, "Oh, I'm not sure." I asked several follow-up questions

which all elicited similar responses.

My impression is that she chose this school because it had a good reputation and it was convenient for their family. Beyond those considerations, she was not prepared to give it much thought.

Another example is my daughter's friend from ballet. The children give an annual Mother's Day presentation. It's the only time parents are allowed to sit in on the class. Each year since my daughter's friend has been enrolled, her mother has missed the presentation because of work commitments. The girl is typically dropped off by her nanny who doesn't care to attend.

I observe many children like this girl who spend the majority of their waking hours in the care of adults who are sufficiently competent. However, these nannies have next-to-no emotional engagement with their charges.

The list of examples of negligence goes on and on. "[Baby Shark](#)" has been watched 4 billion times on YouTube. That song is so dreadful, I wonder if parents who secretly hate their kids are the ones letting them watch. The average American household [watches](#) eight hours of TV a day. Kids [spend](#) only an average of five to seven minutes a day engaged in unstructured play time outdoors. Put those figures together and it is not hard to deduce what kids are doing during all the other hours inside.

But then on other occasions, parents exhibit the "tyrannical" behavior that is usually associated with "helicopter parenting."

This week, my family spent an hour waiting for an appointment in a small lobby along with several other parents and their children. There were some toys available for the kids. Everyone was playing nicely. I didn't observe any bullying or aggression. However, the other parents essentially spent the

entire wait-time micromanaging their children's behavior. One boy picked up a toy that was lying near my kids but which they were obviously not playing with. His father kicked up a hysterical fuss that he should have asked my children's permission before taking it. Later, two children were playing peacefully together when their parents decided they needed to "share" and made them trade the toys they were holding.

At our local playground, I often witness parents who spend the entire time yelling things like "be careful" or "slow down" to their children. Why did they bother to bring their kids at all? It's a safe, modern playground and the whole point is for children to challenge themselves a little.

I truly do not understand the "anarcho-tyranny" contradiction in modern parenting. Modern parents are so busy and overburdened. Maybe – when they can finally give their children their undivided attention – they feel the need to overcompensate. That is the only explanation I can think of. If you have an opinion, please share it in the comments section.

Regardless, wouldn't it be better for children if their parents paid more attention to the important questions and let the small stuff slide?

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