

# Of Laundry Lessons and College

Forgive the long quote coming up, but it is instructive. (And wild!)

The president of Hamilton College, David Wippman, and his colleague, Cornell University American Studies professor Glenn C. Altschuler, have somehow been peeking in on the discussions parents are having online about their kids off at college.

These Facebook groups can be truly helpful if, say, you need to find a ride. But one slightly less pressing thing the parents seem to be discussing is... laundry. As Wippman and Altschuler note in a recent article in *The Hill*, this includes parental discussions of:

*"...the number and location of washing machines and dryers in each residence hall, whether machines are top or front loading, the best dryer settings, whether high-efficiency detergent should be used, room dimensions and setup (including floor plans, diagrams and photos), bed height, sheet size, mattress toppers, dresser capacity, the utility of bed risers and stackable bins, bike storage, rug size, window size, lighting, cleaning supplies, acceptable wall hangings, the advisability of air purifiers, refrigerators, televisions, microwaves, printers, and fans, and, by the parent of a tall student, the height of shower heads in the bathroom."*

It's easy to roll your eyes (mine have only just rolled back). But clearly if scads of folks feel they must provide this kind of granular assistance, it is the culture that is off, not individual moms and dads. It has normalized the idea that young men and women are still children in need of constant handholding.

That's not even true for actual children!

Wippman and Altschuler ask parents to take a step back and realize that every time they're solving a problem for their kids—from how to decorate a dorm room to how to deal with a roommate—they're depriving them of part of their college education. Namely, learning to stand on their own two feet. Perhaps in slightly shrunken socks.

To their advice I would add this: Start early. Ignore the culture telling you that you everything is too hard or dangerous for your kids. Remember your own resilience. Look to other countries that do not have color-changing spoons for when the food is "too hot." Look to other eras when parents did not enroll kids in five-day-a-week adult-run activities, lest they "fall behind." Give them the invaluable experience of making things (imperfectly) happen.

The most moving part of the *Hill* article is a reference to the phrase made famous by then-President Ronald Reagan during the Cold War: "Trust but verify."

The thing is, Reagan totally did NOT trust the Russians. That's why verification was part of the equation. You verify when you don't believe in someone.

For our kids to see that we truly believe in them, we can't be verifying all the time—checking in to see what they need or if they're doing exactly what we'd recommend. When we do this, this message comes through: We love you but don't quite believe you're capable or honest or mature enough to do the things you're supposed to.

As a part-helicopter parent myself, I know how hard it is to not jump in with young kids, with old kids, with kids who aren't actually "kids" anymore and keep changing their facial hair (not always for the better). The only way I've found to meddle less is to be a little less on top of everything my kids are doing. Not caring less but trusting them on their own

a little more.

Not that we should hang our kids out to dry! But maybe we can let them do that to their laundry.

—

COPYRIGHT 2022 CREATORS.COM

Image Credit: Flickr-davitydave, [CC BY 2.0](#)