

Should She Have Helicoptered?

On top of everything else that is vexing about parenting, there's this: You will never know if you're doing it "right." That's because...

No. 1: What the heck IS "right"?

No. 2: How can we know what effect we've had on our kids at all? (If you have more than one, you'll notice they're not the same, even though they all had you as a parent.)

No. 3: When and how do we measure our kids' success?

After all, if we were measuring the parenting prowess of Anna Carpentus van Gogh when her son was a starving painter, we might say, "Jeez, Mrs. van G! Vinny's broke AND he sliced his ear off. What did you DO to that kid?"

But if we waited a few years (or 100) we'd all want copies of "How to Raise a Genius, By Mama van Gogh." Or, better still, one of her son's kindergarten drawings.

All of which is to preface this note I got a while back that haunts me to this day. Voila:

Dear Lenore: I hate to say this but I think the helicopter mommies are right. Now that I am seeing kids in college who grew up this way, I have to admit they are pretty darn perfect. They are getting into the best schools, they are well behaved, they are kind and smart and lovely, they are getting great jobs (oh yes, with their parents' help but hey it's working for them!) and they never seem to get into trouble.

I thought I was doing the right thing by letting my kids take the subway at age 10 and go to Europe alone at 16 but I don't

feel like those real-world things are helping them do well in areas where society seems to care most – you know, things like SAT scores and where they go to college. Sigh. And of course the helicoptered kids do eventually learn to take the subway, even if it's a few years later than mine did.

Signed, Wondering if Everything I Hold Dear is Wrong.

“Wondering” is, of course, already on the road to despair because whenever we compare our kids to anyone else’s, we never know the whole story, which is generally not as simple (or rosy) as it looks. As the great “Blessings of a Skinned Knee” author Wendy Mogel once wrote: “Look at anything up close and you’ll see the flaws. Consider it perfectly normal if you like your child’s friends better than you like your child.”

It sounds like “Wondering” was wishing she’d hovered over every book report and redirected the afternoons spent making mud pies, because she imagines her kids would be very different if she had. But from where I sit (and this is why we can’t compare kids!) there’s still no saying what her kids would have been like. Successful? Resentful? Living in a yurt, sewing Helicopter Mom voodoo dolls? We have no idea.

And what if, instead of looking at the shiny, local helicoptered kids, “Wondering” had picked up a copy of Richard Branson’s autobiography, “Losing My Virginity”? On page one, the mega-mogul writes about his mom making him walk a mile home... when he was 4. When he turned 12, she asked him to bike over to his uncle’s, 50 miles away. Her confidence in him bred the confidence he developed in himself. He considers it the bedrock of his success.

This doesn’t mean helicoptered kids won’t be successful, too. But it sure doesn’t mean independence makes kids flounder.

Spoiler alert: All kids flounder some of the time!

Even bigger spoiler alert: So do parents!

Instead of second-guessing ourselves, let's realize there are a whole lot of influences on our kids. Best advice (and it even rhymes):

Give them love and care.

And try not to compare.

—

COPYRIGHT 2023 CREATORS.COM

Image credit: [Pexels](#)