

Parent *pages*

A Growing
Christian
makes the
Best Parent!

Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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Helicopter parents

With God in control, kids need to learn to make their own decisions

Book bags are a big issue in kindergarten. Before school starts, each student hunts high and low for just the right book bag. Then, some students apparently hire their parents or other adults to carry it for them, hang it up on the hook, and open it to reveal the contents.

Each year, in spite of my protestations at home visits, I must gently but firmly encourage these parents to give their child responsibility for the book bag. There is a time for the child to take responsibility for actions and decisions; a time to carry their own load when climbing the Mount Everest of their life. Knowing when to let go is how we avoid being helicopter parents.

Helicopter parents hover over their children, watching everything, doing things for their children, defending their children even in the face of their guilt, handling reconnaissance to assure the road ahead contains no unexpected bumps.

When we hover, we tell ourselves that we have the best interests of our child at heart, but do we? Helicopter children lack confidence to solve problems and have difficulty regulating emotions when problems do arise. Trying to create a “perfect life” now will only cause more problems later.

Whose problem is it?

If my 2-year-old dumps toys at a friend’s house, he is too young to be held responsible for the mess. I will need to own the problem with him and help him pick up. However, if a 13-year-old leaves a mess in the family bathroom, the prob-

lem is hers. She is old enough to take responsibility. It is my responsibility as a parent to see to it that she makes the problem right.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Eph. 6:1-4

The division of labor is fairly clear in this passage: children are to obey and parents are to train. The promise is not an idle one either. Children who learn to obey also learn the skills and attitudes that make a healthy personality and an enjoyable life. When your children cause themselves trouble, or fail in some way, it does not reflect poorly on you as a parent. We are sinners in a sinful world: failure, on the part of both parents and children, is guaranteed. Children need to try, fail, and succeed at making amends to learn good problem-solving skills. Our task as parents is to learn when our intervention is absolutely necessary.



Whose decision is it?

I am puzzled by parents who tell me at kindergarten round-up that they are going to let their child pick which school to attend. In what way is a 5-year-old competent enough to make such a decision? At the same time I have known parents who refused to let their child pick out clothes for the next day for the fear the child would want to dress entirely in black. We have to give our children small decisions and gradually increase the responsibility as they age. It is appropriate for teenagers to make choices regarding education to prepare them for college and life decisions, but it is not wise to put this burden on young children. A bit of warning—the clothing decisions of teens may not be any more sensible than the choices of kindergartners.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan

of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Eph. 1:11-12

When we make decisions that our children are capable of making on their own, we are struggling with a control issue. We want to control what happens for our child, but, there is a major fallacy in that idea. We are not in control; God is. As parents we are just as incapable of making all the right choices as are our children.

God has a plan for your child, just as He has a plan for you. When you gently guide children through the decision making process you show your child that you have confidence in their God-given abilities; even if those abilities are still developing. Allow your child to make choices, when the decision is age-appropriate, and watch God's plan for your child unfold.

Whose life is it?

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

The trials of early childhood (falling down while learning to walk, the struggles inherent in learning to tie shoes) are relatively minor when compared to the problems that face our teenagers. Bad choices and influences can lead to drug use, suspension, or legal consequences. When that teenager who breezes by you each morning was 12-months-old and learning to walk, you could not possibly smooth out every bump that might cause him to stumble.

Likewise, the teenager you have been watching over and praying over will stumble and fall as she tries new things and finds her way in the world. There will be problems, but there will be learning,



offer my arm for the dreaded blood draws. We could not make the medicine taste better, cause fewer side-effects or make the medical tests less stressful.

We could, however, comfort him and pray over him, and leave him in God's hands. Now at 12, we see a young man who is not only seizure-free, but who also has a strong sense of empathy for the suffering of others. His father and I understand, a little better, how God has brought good out of our son's suffering. We praise God for this blessing.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Cor. 1: 3-4

and there will be a loving and merciful God.

As the James passage indicates, we learn from our troubles and trials, whether they are self-inflicted or seemingly random. Problems solved for our children will not result in perseverance or faith development. My husband and I saw this best when our then 3-year-old son was diagnosed with epilepsy. His father could not suffer the seizures for him; I could not

Helicopter parents do not create a perfect world for their children. Instead they cheat their children out of a self-confidence that comes from their God-given faith. They cheat their children out of learning perseverance and keep them from knowing the comfort only their Savior can give. If you are a helicopter parent, ask God to help you land that vehicle. Let God take over flying that teenager. He knows the flight plan.

Questions for discussion

1. Give examples of helicopter parenting.
2. What types of decisions are too "big" for your children at their current age?
3. What are the benefits of making mistakes in childhood? In parenting?
4. How does God help us through our mistakes and challenges?

Recommended reading:

- "Raising Teens" by Rae Simpson, PhD; Harvard School of Public Health Center for Health Communication

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Kim Marxhausen, Lincoln, Neb., Writer • Frank Kohn, Editor and Layout

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