



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Michael Grose

Five ways to know you are over-parenting

Here's 5 tips to find a more balanced approach to over-parenting or helicopter parenting and encourage children to become independent young people.

Times have changed!

When I began as a parenting educator over two decades ago the biggest issues I spoke about in the media generally revolved around under-parenting. Neglected kids; kids with poor or delinquent behaviour and raising kids that lived on society's margins were popular media topics in the early 1990s.

Now two decades later it's over-parenting that captures the main media attention. Spoilt kids; kids with a false sense of entitlement and parents that place excessive demands on schools are among the popular media topics right now. These all fit into the over-parenting, or more colloquially helicopter parenting category.

Is over-parenting new?

While we hear a great deal about over-parenting at present it's not a new phenomenon. Parents of past generations have been overly protective and over-indulgent of their offspring at times, however it does seem many parents today are a little over-enthusiastic in

their endeavours to optimise the future prospects of the current generation.

In fact, the defining feature of twenty-first century parents is a fierce determination to provide children with the best possible childhood and the best possible start in life. In pursuit of these admirable goals a parent can easily over-extend their role entering areas of children's lives that would have been off-limits to parents a couple of generations ago.

How to know that you are over-parenting

It's a quirk of twenty-first century parenting that we need an objective measure to assess our parenting. Past generations were satisfied with more subjective measures such as whether their kids were happy; whether they got good marks at school; whether they were employable; and whether or not if they stayed out of trouble (read goal in extreme cases)! It's safe to say the parenting waters were far clearer in the past than they appear to be now. But the parenting industry has come

a long way in a short time so we now have stringent indicators that let us know what parenting track we maybe on. And that, for many people, would appear to be the over-parenting track.

You know you are over-parenting if:

- 1 You take on all, or nearly all, of a child's problems.

Kids are good at handballing their problems to their parents. They'll bring disputes with siblings for you to sort; expect you to take forgotten school lunches to school and pester you to organise their after-school lives. Mums and dads that over-parent invariably end up sorting out all their children's problems which may make life easier in the short-term, but can mean kids become more dependent on their parents than children in the past.

Point to remember: *Leave some problems for kids to solve.*

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2 You regularly do for a child the things he or she can reasonably do for themselves.

It's an irony of modern life that the busier parents get the more we tend to do for kids. In the race to get things done we dress young children; prepare children's snacks and accompany them on trips outside the house even when they are old enough to do these activities themselves. If your child is becoming more rather than less dependent the older he becomes then it's probably time to reassess your parenting.

Point to remember: *Never do regularly for a child the things they can do for themselves.*

3 You take on too many of your child's responsibilities

Let's see how you go with these questions! "Who's responsible for getting your child up each morning? Who's responsible for packing lunches and bags? Who is responsible for cleaning away children's toys?" If you answered "My children, of course", then congratulations; you shifted responsibility to where it rightfully lay: with kids. If not, then you guessed it. It may be time for a parenting reassessment.

Point to remember: *If you want a child to be responsible then give responsibility to him.*

4 You know too much about your child's life

Being an attentive parent of a small family invariably means that you know in minute detail every quirk and vagary of your child's life. "He didn't eat all his breakfast this morning. Hmm! That's not good."

"She seems a bit grumpy after school. What's wrong?" "They left their jumper at home. I'd better take it to them." Kids benefit from having some emotional and physical space from their parents. It gives them chances to rely on their own resourcefulness and develop the skills needed to get by on their own.

Point to remember: *A little bit of benign neglect can benefit children's development.*

5 You parent the individual and not the gang

If you are constantly trying to make sure life is smooth for each child then you are probably parenting the individual, rather than for the good of the whole family! I'm not talking about 'playing favourites', but having an intense focus on meeting each individual's wants can often be at the expense of family life in general. For instance, you allow a child to go on a sleepover rather than attend the birthday of a sibling. Parenting the gang means that children need to fit into the patterns of family life and don't always get what they want.

Point to remember: *Raise your small family with a big family mindset.*

Most of the research indicates the authoritative approach as 'parenting best practice'. Authoritative parenting is a mix of firmness and warmth; discipline and nurturance; high expectations and relationship building. It's an approach that sits... surprise, surprise... somewhere between over-parenting and under-parenting.

Yep, as always a balanced approach to parenting, as to most things in life, seems to be the best way to go. Who would've thought it!



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