

CONCERN GONE WILD

The Evolution Of The Helicopter Mom

By Allison Nazarian

REMEMBER DICK AND JANE?

The staple of primary readers for many decades, this series presented an idyllic world with simple sentences, colorful illustrations and a cozy sense of childhood. Just to refresh your memory, the books presented, among others, Dick, the boy; Jane, the girl; Spot, the dog; and of course, Mother and Father.

Mother stayed at home in her cute little shirtwaist dress and white ruffled apron, baking and doling out sage advice, while Father went off to work.

How things have changed!

Over the years, we've added all sorts of additional ways to define moms. These days, we moms seem to have all sorts of adjectives describing us. We've become Soccer Moms, Baseball Moms, Stepmoms, Stay-at-Home Moms and Working Moms.

Now we can add another adjective to Mom (and sometimes Dad, too). Enter the Helicopter Mom (HM) – the person who

pays such close attention to her children that she seems to be very noisily hovering closely, always nearby, over-attentive and over-involved.

The HM is always on the lookout for what she perceives to be threats to her kids' success, progress and happiness. So if a problem, or even the smallest possibility of a problem, appears, she's ready to save the day. (Heaven forbid the kids should actually learn to fix their own mistakes and face their own challenges.)



I see it all the time. At birthday parties and other gatherings, moms (and some dads) recount their frequent school-related visits, phone calls and discussions. They compare notes on this teacher or that curriculum, explain recent fights for their kids' rights and their ongoing efforts to ensure that their own little Dicks and Janes are on the right track.

Oh, and by the way, the HM knows she knows best, so her children's own wishes actually aren't that important in the scheme of things.

The HM term was first coined to describe the parents of college-age kids (www.CollegeBoard.com even has an article on the trend) but is downwardly mobile, all the way into the lives of younger children. These are the parents who are always in contact with teachers, administrators, school decision-makers and even other HMs.

The most "involved" of HMs is the one who crosses the line from mere zeal to unethical behavior, such as writing their children's college essays, intervening in disputes, registering their college children for classes (after interviewing professors), and going directly to the source to regularly question their offsprings' grades.

In the world of my two elementary-schoolers, I see it all the time. At birthday parties and other gatherings, moms (and some dads) recount their frequent school-related visits, phone calls and discussions. They compare notes on this teacher or that curriculum, explain recent fights for their kids' rights and their ongoing efforts to ensure that their own little Dicks and Janes are on the right track...that is, the track they're paving for them.

So what's wrong with caring about your kids? About being involved in their lives? About knowing what they're doing and why? Absolutely nothing! The problem is when the involvement goes beyond caring and into the realm of over-managing and plain-old smothering, which experts tell us can slow or alter a child's emotional and social growth; keep a child from naturally learning accountability and responsibility; and overload the whole family with nervousness and anxiety.

Of course, it's never too late to right a wrong. Maybe we can take a page from the simplistic black-and-white world of Dick and Jane. As we all know very well, when it comes to parenting our kids, perfection is not only an impossible expectation but an unhealthy one, as well.

The key between what works and what hovers, makes noise and impedes growth, can be found in the difference between making noise when it's really needed and in keeping the chopper grounded when it's time to let the kids make their own way. ○