

## That Noise You Hear May Be a Helicopter Parent

*By Irv Sternberg*

My knowledge of helicopters can accurately be described as limited. Yes, I know that a guy named Igor Sikorsky is usually credited with developing the first machine with a rotary blade and a tall tail that could lift vertically, hover, and move in any direction guided by a pilot. I think of names like Bell, the manufacturer, and of military choppers with names like Chinook, Apache and Black Hawk. And that's about it.

More recently, I learned about another kind of helicopter – the “helicopter mom.” The term derives from Mom's determination to control her child's destiny by hovering over him or her (like a helicopter) and involving herself in all aspects of the child's life to protect him from harm, identify and remove obstacles and smooth the path to success. In short, do everything possible to make sure the child achieves a first class education, a satisfying and well-paying career, or a totally wonderful marriage.

That kind of parent, in years past, would be called “overprotective,” but today the behavior of a helicopter mom goes far beyond the old-fashioned overprotective mom. You might say the helicopter mom attempts to control all aspects of a child's life, and its destiny.

The term first appeared in the best-selling book called *Between Parent and Teenager* in 1969. The term “helicopter parent” gained popularity when millennials reached college age and their Baby Boomer parents gained notoriety for calling their children every morning to wake them up for classes. They also complained to faculty members about the grades their children were receiving

This parental intervention continued even as their offspring entered into graduate schools. But it didn't end there. Some helicopter parents advocated for pay increases and promotions for their under-appreciated darlings.

So how did this phenomenon begin? A number of reasons have been suggested.

1. A booming economy gave parents more time to intervene.
2. There was an increased fear of child endangerment rooted in paranoia, according to some psychiatrists.
3. As tuition charges rose, parents felt a greater need to protect their “investment.”
4. The cell phone became the world's longest umbilical cord.
5. And my own opinion: Parents perceived a more competitive, harsher work environment and sought ways to help their kids succeed in a fiercer “dog-eat-dog” culture.

Parents who believed they were actually helping their children reported being happy, but a Medical Research Council study reported that “psychological control can limit a child's independence and leave them less able to regulate their own behavior. A funny thing happens when helicopter moms become elderly and are perceived as virtually helpless. Then roles are reversed and their children become their helicopter moms.