How Do You Know If You Are A Helicopter Parent?

Given all the negative attention they receive in the media, you might expect to find swarms of “helicopter parents” at every high school and college campus across the country. These overly involved parents earned that nickname because they hover over their children, swooping in to fight their battles and make their decisions for them.

But such parents may in fact be rare. What’s more, a recent study found that a high level of parental involvement correlates with a positive college experience.

The Benefits of Parental Involvement
There is mounting evidence that parents should take more rather than less interest in their children’s education. In a review of research studies, the Harvard Family Research Project found that teens whose parents play an active role do better in school and are more likely to enroll in college.

How many parents went to extremes? Not as many as you might think. More than 30 percent of students surveyed said their parents were very involved in the college admissions process. But parents almost always stopped short of doing the work on their own.

What about those students whose parents do get overly involved and continue to hover after they start college? According to the National Survey of Student Engagement, they are more engaged in their studies, taking part in more educational activities, and are more satisfied with their college experience. It’s important to note that the survey defined helicopter parents as those who often meet with campus officials to solve their child’s problems. The study also found that the children of helicopter parents earned lower grades. But the report doesn’t blame parental intervention. Rather, it theorizes that parents take action because their children struggle in school.

A Healthy Balance
So is there such a thing as too much parental involvement after all? Yes. While participation in a child’s education is encouraged, parents should respect the needs of maturing teens. As children grow, they need to practice making their own decisions—with guidance from their parents. The Harvard report advises that teens need to face challenges that will build skills and self-esteem. They should take advantage of opportunities to shape their identity and speak their mind.

As you strive to maintain a healthy balance, try thinking of yourself as a coach. You’re there to provide structure, give advice, and serve as a role model, but it’s your child who needs to step up to the plate. Instead of keeping track of college application deadlines yourself, for example, work as a team to set up a calendar or weekly planner and let your child take charge of meeting those deadlines. You can also help by sharing your own strategies for staying organized.

Take a Quiz
Take a mini quiz at [http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/plan/getting-ready/155044.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/plan/getting-ready/155044.html) to see if you are playing too big a role in your student’s education. The response might surprise you.