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Ask Dr. Harold "Lawnmower" Parents

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works. I recently took my 15 year old nephew surfing. It was cold, big, stormy surf. One of his favorite moments was, as he put it, "getting absolutely obliterated by a big set."

Here is how it works. If I am a first grader and I can't sound out a blend to save my life, I look around the world and find something that I am good at and I build positive self-esteem around that. Kids look around and say, "Hey I am not a classroom kid, I am a playground kid." The majority of our kids are positive self-esteem-building machines. When we do so much that they never fail, we are doing too much.

One of the principals at our training talked about the drop-off table at his school and how he was going to get rid of it. He felt that the parents dropping off lunches and clothes and projects and homework was contributing to the lack of initiative, creativity, and responsibility he was seeing in his high school students. His opinion was that if the child goes hungry or has to share with other kids to get their lunch, then they will build the type of out-of-the-box thinking that only a hungry kid can come up with. When we make our kids' lives easier and take away their creativity and initiative, we are doing too much.

I have to getting going now as I forgot to make my son's lunch and need to go drop it off.....all that tough talk starts in January, you know!

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A couple of weeks ago I was conducting a training with a group of Catholic school principals. The subject of helicopter parents came up. I heard a new term when the superintendent said, "We call them lawnmower parents because the blades are much closer to the ground."

Helicopter or lawnmower parents are a concept I was first introduced to in an e-mail sent out to the faculty at Santa Clara University two years ago. The e-mail contained instructions on how to deal with parents of undergraduates who were following up on the assignments of their children. I would like you to think just for a moment about some of our patterns of interacting with our children. The principals discussed it and frankly they were of the opinion that we parents are doing too much for our kids.

So, are we doing too much for our kids?

In developmental psychology, the human being attempts to solve new problems using techniques that were successful in solving problems in the past. This process is important because through trial and error (that is right, I said error) we learn. The one-year-old throws his spoon/food/plates on the floor because it gets your attention. If you attend to the child only when they make noise or throw things then you are using behavioral psychology to teach your child to do those very activities that you do not like. If we keep our children from making mistakes we are doing too much.

In the recent research on brain development, we have learned that on average, boys' brains develop their motor areas more quickly than their language areas. We also know that on average, language areas of boys' brains can develop one or more years behind those of girls. In his book *Boys Adrift*, Dr. Leonard Sax notes that boys opt out of school because their brains are not ready for the curriculum that has made its way from 1st and 2nd grade into kindergarten.

Part of why we parents do not understand why boys are opting out, is that many of us were raised when the world decided that avoiding poor self-esteem was the main goal of psychological development. I do not argue that it is better to feel good about yourself, but the breakdown happens when we equate failing or struggling at a task with low self-esteem. That is just not how it