

# Helicopter parents in Sisters?

By Edie Jones  
Columnist

A “Helicopter Parent” is a parent who is always “hovering and rescuing.” It’s a negative label. Since it appears to be a universal expression, what does it mean in Sisters and how are the parents here avoiding or embracing this model of parenting?

That was the question I set out to answer after reading an article in *The Bulletin* that reported the views of Julie Lythcott-Haims, a former dean at Stanford. Lythcott-Haims made the observation that college students were increasingly less able to take care of themselves. She states that, “We want so badly to help them by shepherding them from milestone to milestone and shielding them from failure and pain. But over-helping causes harm. It can leave young adults without the strengths of skill, will, and character that are needed to know themselves and to craft a life.”

To find out how Sisters’ parents and kids are doing I talked with Rick Kroytz, the advisor to the ASPIRE Program at Sisters High School (SHS), and one of the ASPIRE volunteers, Phyllis Smith. ASPIRE uses volunteer mentors from the community to help prepare high school students as they

move toward graduation. According to Kroytz, “our kids and parents do pretty well” at avoiding the “helicopter pitfall” and contributes that to the impact of adult volunteers on the students. Community mentors develop adult/adult relationships with their charges, sharing visions of the future and looking at ways to meet those dreams. As parents recognize the value of that relationship they are able to relax, worrying less about where their young person is headed.

Charlie Kanzig, the counselor at the high school, compared helicoptering here with the “Tiger Moms” he met while working in South Korea. There, he said, “The mother’s job was to guarantee their child would succeed.”

Kanzig’s role, there and here, is to help parents allow their kids to own as much as possible — backing off and letting the kids fill out the applications, ask the questions and get the interview. Here he finds parents do better. He gives much of the credit to the relationships developed between the teachers and kids. The teachers are demanding while being supportive, building feelings of mutual respect that drive the students to want to succeed.

He, like Kroytz,

mentioned the involvement of other adults in the community and the atmosphere that creates an “I believe in you” attitude within the school. Kanzig noted that parents need enough information to be comfortable to avoid being helicopter parents. So, good, clear communication is important.

Joe Hosang, SHS principal, feels that most parents are supportive, and for that the school is very grateful. He does feel that parents and teachers need to allow students to fail when they are not achieving on their own. By not rescuing, allowing perseverance, grit and endurance to carry forward to success, adults are creating real-world experiences that prepare students for the adversity each child will eventually face.

Rand Runco, a teacher at the high school, feels the onslaught of technology and the ability of parents to communicate with teachers at will, instead of speaking face-to-face, has contributed to miscommunications that may foster helicopter parenting. At times he is faced with as many as 40 emails a day. On the other side, he’s not sure the kids are being asked to act responsibly when a reminder by texting is so common and easy. He feels the solution is a matter of catching up with

technology and learning to use it properly.

Jenifer Noble, Sisters Elementary School counselor, is a parent of three elementary school-age children and three adult children. She has the advantage of looking at the problem from several perspectives. She asks the question: “10 years ago would we have ever considered giving a cell phone to a 9-year-old? Today, how many 9-year-olds need them to stay in touch with parents who are at work?”

Noble also points out the academic pressure children are experiencing at a younger age, which puts pressure on parents to make sure all of the homework gets accomplished. And, there are all of the outside activities. What is important, what is too much? Is it helicoptering when parents make all the arrangements to make things happen, or is it just doing the right thing?

She has also had the experience of guiding her adult kids through the college application process.

“It used to be easier. Now, with higher tuition, the stakes are higher so parents are looking over the shoulders of their kids. Did I helicopter him to get that scholarship when I encouraged him to add his Eagle Scout accomplishments to his résumé? It’s a fine line. There are lots of things that drive this. We who grew up as latch-key kids want to be there for our kids. Is this helicopter parenting? Perhaps. It’s complicated. We don’t know how to navigate the fine line, later finding our kids don’t know how to make decisions. Parents want to do the best for their kids and that’s what’s most important.”

*Edie Jones is an early-childhood educator and author of “Raising Kids with Love, Honor, and Respect: Recipes for Success.”*

# Girls basketball players raise funds

Sisters Outlaws girls basketball players will be bagging groceries at Ray’s Food Place in Sisters as part of a fundraiser for the program.

They’ll be at it all day on Saturday, January 9 from

10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

They’ll be “celebrity bagging” and carrying groceries for customers.

The girls are seeking donations to cover season and summer program costs.

The event is a great time to buy an Outlaw Card — offering more than \$100 in discounts at local businesses (including Ray’s, Dutch Bros., Sisters Coffee Co.) — for \$20. The card is good throughout 2016.

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