

Bringing up baby: Are you a tiger mum or a helicopter dad?

LAWNMOVER, helicopter, tiger – there's no end of ways to bring up your child, but which one is the daddy? Rachel Carlyle investigates

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It sometimes seems that the world of parenthood has split into warring tribes, each convinced that theirs is the only way of bringing up baby. But what do the experts say – and just where do you and your family **fit** in?

Helicopter parents

They hover anxiously so their precious offspring never come to any harm – the world is a dangerous place, after all. It all starts by standing under the climbing frame (“no higher, sweetie, that’s enough...”) and progresses to obsessively monitoring school grades and screening friends.

Most likely to say: “Those toddler helmets are a brilliant invention.”

Does it work? You may stop them from falling, but in the long term this approach prevents children from assessing risk, which is vital to development. Studies show that children are naturally good risk-assessors, and most wouldn’t climb much higher than their parent allows, even without supervision. Helicoptered children are also more likely to take bigger risks as teenagers because they’ve had no practice with small hazards.

Underparents

Also known as slacker, sloth or free-range parents, these are essentially too lazy – or too busy – to micro-manage their children’s lives, arguing that kids need more freedom. Their poster girl is Lenore Skenazy – branded “world’s worst mom” for letting her nine year old travel on the New York subway alone – who started the blog [www.freerange kids.com](http://www.freerangekids.com).

Most likely to say: “Failing is the new succeeding.”

Does it work? Children learn best by finding their own motivation, discovering their passions and learning social skills by playing without adults present. They also learn resilience if they are allowed to fail. But this is not to be confused with negligent parenting – you have to teach them how to be safe before giving them freedom.

Lawnmower parents

Also known as snow plough parents, they are desperate to clear away all obstacles in the path of their brilliant child. They will intervene to “save” them from every pain and inconvenience: dropping off forgotten school lunches, hiring tutors and berating teachers for bad grades.

Intensely competitive, they believe they are helping their children achieve their full potential in a cut-throat world.

Most likely to say: “I’ve emailed the essay we wrote to your lecturer.”

Does it work? Your child may get high grades as long as you are around to help, but over-involvement can be damaging. The child can become dependent and feel constantly under pressure, says research, and because they never have to face the consequences of their own actions they won’t learn from their mistakes. By doing everything for our children, we also imply that they are not good enough to achieve things themselves.

Outsourcer parents

Why bring up your children when you can pay a professional to do it for you?

A report in New York magazine calculated that this could cost £2.6 million per child for a complete service including maternity nurse for a year, behavior and etiquette consultants, a live-in nanny and tutoring. Oh, and someone to teach the kids how to ride their bikes.

Most likely to say: “Goodness, is it really your birthday today?”

Does it work? You may have a walking, talking, educated adult at the end, but will you know them? It’s going through developmental milestones with your children – like learning to ride a bike – that strengthens the bonds between you. It’s tempting for working parents to farm out the troublesome bits so they can concentrate on fun time, but children feel loved and secure when parents set the boundaries and, as any divorced dad will tell you, “treat parenting” doesn’t work.

Tiger parents

These are the ultimate authoritarians who believe a punishing work schedule will result in academic glory. They’re exemplified by Yale law professor Amy Chua, whose daughters Sophia and Lulu weren’t allowed sleepovers, had to practice piano or violin for two hours a day, were only praised for getting

As in exams and weren’t allowed to take part in school plays, as they were considered a distraction.

Most likely to say: “I’ll donate your dolls’ house to the Salvation Army if this piece isn’t perfect next time” (Chua did actually say this).

Does it work? Well, Chua’s older daughter got into Harvard, played piano at Carnegie Hall and wrote a defense of her mother after worldwide criticism. But Lulu rebelled from the age of 13.

By taking over your children’s personal sense of control and motivation, you stunt their development and a hectic schedule deprives them of the downtime vital to figure out their own identity and thoughts. A study found that children of tiger parents were less creative and did less original thinking than others.

But emphasizing that anything is possible with hard work is a good lesson for all parents – and their children – to absorb.