

12/20/18

New Year's Resolutions for Helicopter Parents

By David F. Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

Good parents want their kids to stay out of trouble, do well in school and go on to become thriving adults who do awesome things. In our eagerness and enthusiasm, we as parents often become too involved and over manage our children's lives. We sometimes refer to this tendency as "helicopter parenting." Unfortunately, this kind of parenting often backfires and sometimes hinders and damages the healthy emotional growth and development of a child. While there isn't a set recipe for raising successful children, research has pointed to a handful of factors that predict success.

Given the beginning of a new year, I'll frame these key factors as Recommended New Year's Resolutions for Raising Successful Kids:

I Will Make My Kids do Chores

If kids aren't doing the dishes and other chores, it means someone else is doing these things for them. Julie Lythcott-Haims, former dean of Stanford University, states, "... they're absolved of not only the work, but of learning that work has to be done and that each one of us must contribute for the betterment of the whole." She notes that kids raised on chores go on to become employees who collaborate well with their coworkers, are more empathetic and are able to take on tasks independently.

I Will Teach My Kids Social Skills

In a research study, 700 children were tracked from kindergarten to age 25. The study found a significant correlation between their social skills as kindergarteners and their success as adults two decades later. Socially competent children who could cooperate with their peers without prompting, be helpful to others, understand their feelings and resolve problems on their own were far more likely to earn a college degree, than those with limited social skills.

As a Parent, I Will Have Healthy Relationships with Other Adults

Children in high-conflict families, whether intact or divorced, tend to fare worse than children of parents who get along. Studies have shown children in non-conflictual single-parent families fare better than children in conflict-oriented two-parent families. As parents, our behavior and actions model the kind of relationships our children will learn and embody.

I Will Have High Expectations for My Kids

The expectations a parent holds for their kids have a huge effect on their attainment. For example, parents who regularly frame college or post-high school training seemed to guide their child toward that goal irrespective of their income and other assets. This falls in line with the Pygmalion Effect, which states, "what one person expects of another can come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy."

I Will Value Effort Over Avoiding Failure

Along with high expectations, it's important that parents prepare their children for failures and disappointments. Children are able to grow and thrive when their parents frame failure and setbacks as opportunities and springboards for growth and stretching existing abilities.

I Will Be "Authoritative" Rather Than "Authoritarian" or "Permissive"

Diana Baumrind, a psychologist from the University of California at Berkeley, found that there are three kinds of parenting styles:

- Permissive: The parent tries to be nonpunitive and accepting of the child.
- Authoritarian: The parent shapes and controls the child based on a set standard of conduct.
- Authoritative: The parent tries to direct the child rationally.

The ideal is authoritative, where the child grows up to respect authority, but does not feel controlled or manipulated.

These are worthy resolutions to consider if you're a fellow parent who may tend to over manage, control and dictate. If we strive to follow these resolutions, we will empower our children to be emotionally healthy, independent and successful adults.