

How to Avoid Being a Helicopter Professor

Based on the work of Berlin Fang



Placing blame on parents is easy.



Accepting that we may be
a problem is a bit harder.

Helicopter professors, like their parenting counterparts, hover over students, swooping in to rescue them from any hint of failure or challenge. Just as helicopter parenting can be harmful to children, helicopter professorship poses similar threats to students, not the least of which is creating disengaged students dependent on professors for all aspects of their learning and development.

You might be a helicopter professor if . . .

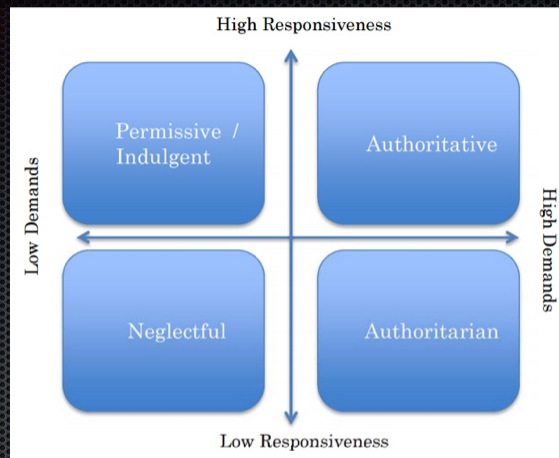
- you make yourself available all the time, instead of setting clear office hours
- you constantly remind students what is due and when
- you troubleshoot common technical errors when students should be doing so themselves



You might be a helicopter professor if . . .

- you send the same instructions repeatedly
- you use multiple methods, including extra credit, till everyone is happy with their grades
- You provide too many sub-steps for students to complete a task, not trusting students to do the right thing





Finding the balance

Permissive/Indulgent

Permissive (or indulgent) teachers are involved in and devoted to teaching, but they fear causing stress for students and often pitch their classroom information and pace to the slowest learner. These teachers often supplement class lectures with handouts and PowerPoint slides and other student guides, making it nearly impossible for someone to fail.

“They spend countless hours working with students who ask for help.”

Permissive teachers set deadlines but they tend to be flexible in enforcing them, making special arrangements for students as needed.

Neglectful

At the other extreme, neglectful teachers are neither responsive to students nor demanding in any particular way. “They come to class, deliver the same lectures year after year, discourage questions and make their escape with as little student contact as possible.”

Neglectful teachers make no effort at class discipline, ignoring any misbehavior that arises, and tend to view students as threatening and complaining.

Authoritarian

Authoritarian teachers have little involvement or engagement with students but nonetheless maintain strict discipline in their classrooms. They expect high achievement and assign grades appropriately, but tend to make no exceptions for rules or deadlines.

Authoritarian teachers are not nurturing, may ignore requests for help, and often do not provide any personal attention or encouragement to students.

Authoritative

Authoritative teachers are those with a high level of responsiveness and involvement, combined with tough standards and fair discipline. They care about their students and are willing to help, but are also cautious to maintain boundaries in terms of their time and energy. Authoritative teachers reward good performance, not just effort, and they encourage students as needed.

“They think carefully about their rules and standards, announce them in advance, explain why they are necessary and enforce them constantly.” But they are also willing to extend special dispensation if circumstances justify it under school policy.

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