

**Passage 1.** *Claire Miller thinks parents are harming their children by the way they parent.*

- 1 Helicopter parenting, the practice of hovering anxiously near one's children, monitoring their every activity, is so 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some affluent mothers and fathers now are more like snowplows: machines chugging ahead, clearing any obstacles in their child's path to success, so they don't have to encounter failure, frustration or lost opportunities.
- 2 Snowplowing (also known as lawn-mowing and bulldozing) has become the most brazen mode of parenting of the privileged children in the everyone-gets-a-trophy generation. It starts early, when parents get on wait lists for elite preschools before their babies are born and try to make sure their toddlers are never compelled to do anything that may frustrate them. It gets more intense when school starts: running a forgotten assignment to school or calling a coach to request that their child make the team. Later, it's writing them an excuse if they procrastinate on schoolwork, paying a college counsellor thousands of dollars to perfect their applications or calling their professors to argue about a grade.
- 3 Yes, it's a parent's job to support the children, and to use their adult wisdom to prepare for the future when their children aren't mature enough to do so. But if children have never faced an obstacle, what happens when they get into the real world? In short, they flounder. In elite colleges today, students rely on their parents to set up play dates with people in their dorm or complain to their child's employers when an internship didn't lead to a job. The root cause are parents who had never let their children make mistakes or face challenges. Such parents have it backward. The point is to prepare the child for the road, instead of preparing the road for the child.
- 4 Helicopter parenting is a term that came into vogue in the 1980s and grew out of fear about children's physical safety — that they would fall off a play structure or be kidnapped at the bus stop. Snowplow parenting is an even more obsessive form. There's a constant monitoring of where their child is and what they are doing, all with the intent of preventing something happening and becoming a barrier to the child's success. The destination at the end of the road is often admission to college. For many wealthy families, it has always been a necessary badge of accomplishment for the child — and for the parents. A college degree has also become increasingly essential to earning a middle-class wage.
- 5 Learning to solve problems, take risks and overcome frustration are crucial life skills, many child development experts say, and if parents don't let their children encounter failure, the children don't acquire them. When a 3-year-old drops a dish and breaks it, she's probably going to try not to drop it the next time. When a 20-year-old sleeps through a test, he's probably not going to forget to set his alarm again.
- 6 Snowplowing has gone so far, they say, that many young people are in crisis, lacking these problem-solving skills and experiencing record rates of anxiety. There are now classes to teach children to practice failing, at college campuses around the country and even for preschoolers. Many snowplow parents know it's problematic, too. But because of privilege or peer pressure or anxiety about their children's futures, they do it anyway.

**Passage 2.** *Matthias Doepke makes a case in favour of being a helicopter parent.*

- 1 We love the idea of “free-range” parenting. Our childhoods in the 1970s followed this approach to the letter — and it was a lot of fun. Our parents did the bare minimum of supervision. Afternoons and evenings were spent at friends’ houses, exploring the neighborhood and the nearby woods, or playing soccer with other children. Worries about the future or our standing in school rarely crossed our minds. 5
  
- 2 Most American parents today follow a very different approach. First-graders have busy schedules, with afternoons filled with activities ranging from music and sports to chess. Even “play dates” are now officially scheduled. Overall, time use data show that American parents spend twice as much time caring for and supervising their children today than what was the norm in the 1970s, even though most families are smaller today with just one or two children, instead of three or four as was common then. 10
  
- 3 Have American parents lost their way? We don’t think so. Research suggests that this radical shift in child rearing, while perhaps more stressful for both parents and children, is a smart response of loving parents to a changed world. Economic shifts have raised the stakes in parenting, giving parents little choice but to give up the free-range approach they enjoyed as children. 15
  
- 4 The main change is a stark rise in both economic inequality and the economic benefits of more education. In the 1970s, inequality was lower than ever before, and unemployment was low as well. College graduates earned more on average than high school graduates, but not by much. In addition to the usual college-prep curriculum of math, English, and history, high schools offered vocational training, which often led to well-paid and stable blue-collar jobs. All of this meant that there was more than one path to a secure middle-class existence, and therefore pushing children to maximum school achievement and onward to top colleges was not a priority for most American parents. 20
  
- 5 Today, there is a much larger gap between those who succeed in education and those who don’t. It’s no secret that the wages of workers who didn’t attend college have stagnated for decades. College graduates now make about twice as much as high school graduates, and face lower unemployment risk. Other gaps have opened up: college graduates are healthier, more likely to get married, and more likely to stay married than adults with less education. All this explains why today’s parents are anxious and willing to put in a lot of effort to give their children an extra push. 25
  
- 6 If today’s parents follow the “helicopter” rather than the “free range” approach, it is because it works. Free time for children is not always productive. Thinking of our own childhoods, in between occasional moments of creative discovery and play we also spent many hours watching mindless TV. Most boys today would admit that they would use additional free time primarily for playing video games. Marathon Fortnite sessions are surely entertaining, but they won’t help much with the math test next week. 30  
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- 7 In fact, intensive parenting is associated with success in school. In the international PISA study of student performance, the children of such parents score substantially higher in math, reading, and science, even if we compare otherwise similar parents with the same level of education. This is true across a large set of countries. Specific activities correlated with child success are reading books with children, telling them stories, and discussing politics with them, although most likely it is less the details but the overall close interaction between parents and children that counts. 40
  
- 8 The “free range” movement may have a point that some of today’s parents are overprotective and stifle their children’s growth. But by and large, today’s parents are doing just fine by their children, given the world we now live in. As much as we like free-range parenting, we don’t expect a return to the old ways unless there is a reversal in the economic changes that have driven up the stakes in parenting. Those who want to go back to an age when parents were relaxed and children were free would do well to remember that it’s not the parents’ fault — it is the economy. 45