
Changing the Parenting Path: A Deep Dive Into Ineffective Behaviors

The Dorm Parent Collective

Defining Ineffective Behaviors

Behavior: (n) the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others. (Oxford Dictionary)

As humans we behave in different ways in different situations. The same is true of parenting behaviors. Sometimes behaviors are helpful to a situation and sometimes they are not.

An **ineffective behavior** is one that generally begins from a place of good intention *and* has a negative impact. The purpose of taking a look at these behaviors is not to doubt the intentionality behind it, but to acknowledge at the impact the behavior has on our relationships.

We all engage in behaviors that are ineffective. By increasing our awareness of these behaviors, we take the first step in identifying new behaviors that can be more effective in our relationships.

Ineffective Parenting Behaviors

We took a look at these in other collectives -

- Engaging in protecting their behaviors
- “Bailing” out your child (money, school)

This week we will look further into the following:

- **“Helicoptering”**
- **Being a friend vs. a parent**
- **Lack of acceptance of sexuality, gender identity, career path**

Next session we will explore:

- Reactivity (yelling, threatening, etc.)
- Over vocalizing disappointments
- Passive aggression

Areas that impact all of these behaviors are:

- Not controlling own emotions/anxiety
- not taking care of own needs

If an item on this list struck a nerve - then it is probably something worth looking into.

Helicoptering

Helicopter parenting describes a style of parents who are “overly focused” on their children and **“overly involved” in their day-to-day decisions**. You may be stuck in a helicoptering cycle if you find yourself taking too much responsibility for, or defining your worth as a parent by, your child’s successes/failures.

We often “helicopter” out of avoidance of our own anxiety, protecting our child from disappointment, or as overcompensation from our own childhood. Unfortunately, it not only inhibits our children’s growth, but may lead to resentment and lack of confidence on their part.

Signs of Helicoptering:

- Giving constant directives to child/young adult
- Micromanaging tasks they would be expected to be able to do alone
- Not knowing what your child is doing feels intolerable

“The Friend Zone”

As our children grow into adulthood, it is natural to become closer to them on an emotionally mature level. However, when the parenting relationship crosses over into the “friend zone,” it can become difficult to maintain boundaries as the power dynamic has blurred.

Signs of a “friend zone” dynamic:

- Treating your child as your confidant: disclosing marital issues, financial concerns, etc.
- Venting to child about your own relationships, their siblings, or others that they have a relationship with.
- Realizing your child is your main source of support, or vice-versa

**This trait is common in divorced families, as there is often one parent who forms a closer relationship with the child and may discuss the other parent with them.*

Lack of Acceptance

Lack of acceptance of sexuality, gender identity, career path, degree/school, etc.

- Power struggle
- Message that they are **wrong, bad, not capable** of doing it
- Enmeshed dynamics or disjointed/disconnected family
- Continued suffering

Acceptance is **not** the same as resignation

- Giving up, without hope
- Allowing emotions to exist ≠ choosing to not take action

Willingness to see things the way they actually are

- -> saying nothing about what they will be in the future

Changing Our Approach

Let's remember - all ineffective parenting behaviors begin with **good intentions**.

Helicoptering may begin because a parent is lacking trust their child will take appropriate steps, protecting behaviors may have arisen as an attempt to help support your loved one, and “friend zone” patterns often start as an attempt to connect.

The issue is that these natural reactions don't solve the root of the issue - they only exacerbate it.

In order to change course, we need to step back, and allow for the discomfort that is part of the process of allowing our children to mature.

Practice Acceptance

- Notice the struggle, observe & acknowledge
- Gently remind yourself of the reality → use a gentle mantra “this was painful/is hard for me / isn’t what I wanted and this is what happened”
- Engage in full body acceptance, use guided imagery or visualization
- Opposite action: DO what you would do if you accepted the facts.
- Allow room for difficult feelings
- Show self-compassion & practice self-care
- LET GO OF THE REINS

Relaxation & Self-Care

Physical: activities to care for and improve your physical health	Emotional: activities that encourage you to acknowledge, connect, and reflect on your emotions	Mental: activities to stimulate & activate your mind
Social: activities that allow you to nurture your relationships with others	Practical: working on tasks that address housekeeping or reducing future stress	Spiritual: activities that nurture your spirit

Questions to Consider

- What ineffective behavior is my biggest struggle?
- Where did I learn these behaviors?
- What makes this behavior problematic in my relationship with my child?
- What is my *intention* behind my parenting behaviors?
- What am I doing behaviorally that is effective?