

**How Not to Hover**  
**Guiding Your Child Through The  
College Search**

## What is a “Helicopter Parent”?

A helicopter parent is a term for a person who pays extremely close attention to their child or children, particularly at educational institutions.

## Why Helicopter?

...parents are right there, hovering around their children at all times...

Neil Howe, author of *Millennials Go To College*

## Myths Parents Believe

Myth: “There’s only one right college (or school) for my child.”

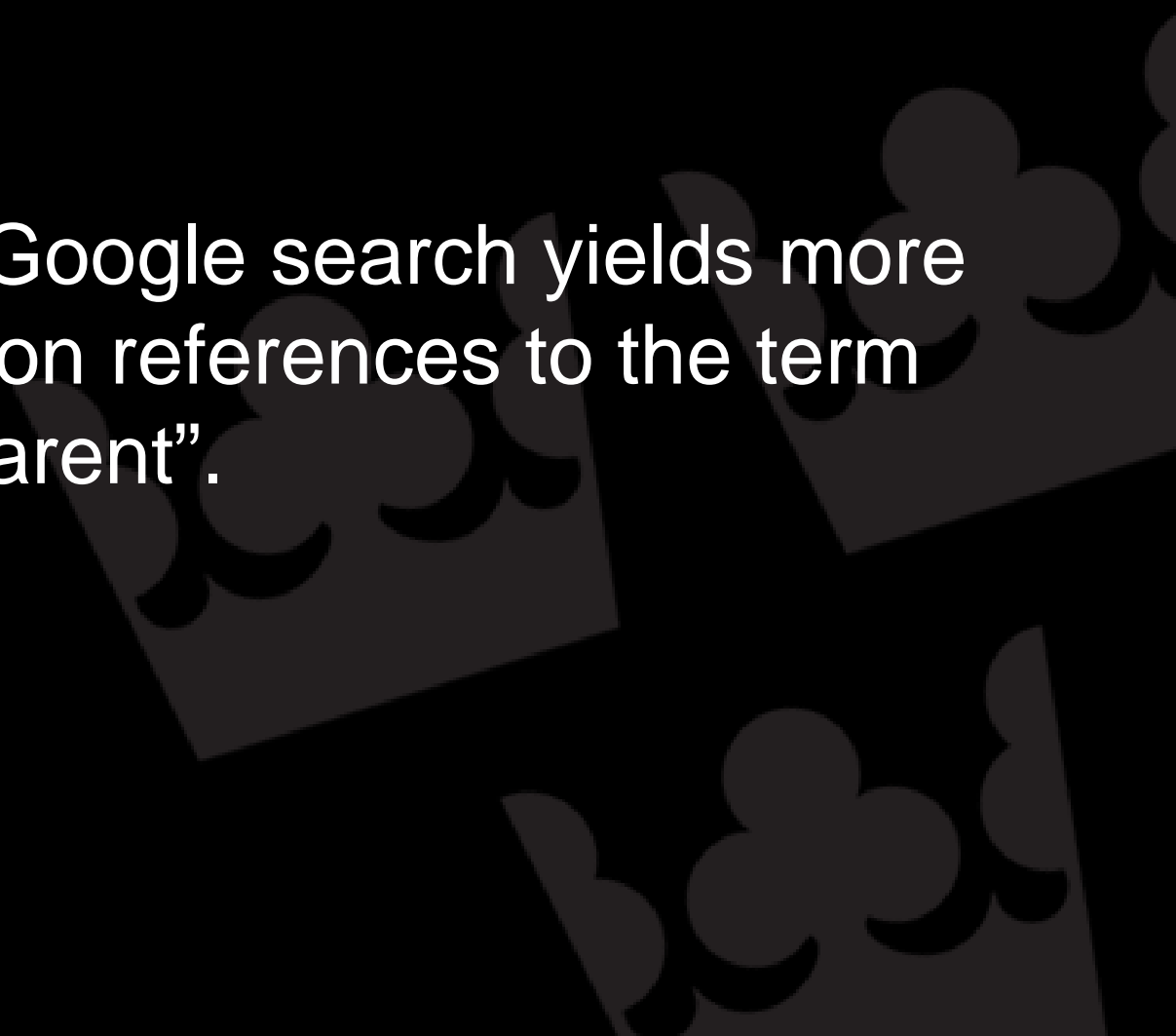
Reality: Of the 4000 colleges and university in the US, there are dozens where any child of whatever ability can make the most of his or her potential.

## Myths Parents Believe

Myth: “In a label-conscious culture, if students don’t make it into a big-name college, they’ll always lag behind those who did.”

Reality: All the research shows zero financial impact on long-term success of attending a big-name university: what one *does* in college tracks with success not where one *went* to college.

A very simple Google search yields more than 2.2 million references to the term “helicopter parent”.



## Another definition

Parents who are a bit too involved in their child's day-to-day lives at school. Overprotective moms and dads come from all walks of life, but have one thing in common: hovering over their children and being willing to swoop down to intervene at every setback.

## The Lawnmower Parent

They will mow down anything that gets in their way.

## The Kamikaze Parent

Parents who have mowed down the guidance and admissions offices and now are moving into the work place.

## Negative Effects of Helicopter Parenting?

- Children's growth is stunted.
- Parents feel more anxiety.

## Parents' Role in College Search

“General guidance, most of decision to child”

– 49%

“Help narrowing the field; letting child choose” – 44%

“Selecting the college for child” – 4.5%

“Not helping” – 2.5%

## Employee Benefit

Parents spend an average of 150 hours assisting their student with the college search process, with 50% of that time making calls to colleges or doing research online at work.

CollegeBoard has created a survey to help parents assess themselves...

“Are you a Helicopter Parent”?

[www.collegeboard.com/parents](http://www.collegeboard.com/parents)

## Are you a Helicopter Parent?

1. Do you search college websites for your child?
2. Do you have a strong influence over the high school courses your child takes?
3. Do you play the lead role in planning and scheduling your child's activities?
4. Are you planning to prepare your child for campus interviews?
5. Do you plan on directly contacting faculty, coaches, or other individuals at the colleges your child is interested in?

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6. Do you review the publications and other materials colleges send to your child?
7. Are you planning to write your child's application essays or fill out his or her college applications?
8. Do you meet with the high school counselor about college plans without your child present?
9. Do you discuss with friends or relatives colleges that might be a good fit for your child?
10. Have you helped your child find a job or discussed his or her future career possibilities?
11. Have you discussed with your child which colleges you can afford and how your family will pay for them?
12. Do you encourage your child to apply to certain schools or add schools to your child's list for consideration?

## Four or Fewer “Yes” answers

**Get More Involved:** The level and nature of your involvement suggest that your child might benefit from more assistance. Consider being more proactive.

## Five or more “Yes” answers

### **WARNING! Possible Helicopter Parent:**

Consider giving your child more responsibility for college consideration and choice.

## How Do You Know If You're a Helicopter Parent?

- You are in constant contact with your child.
- You are in constant contact with school administration.
- You make your child's academic decisions.
- You feel bad about yourself if your child does not do well.

Parents have even formed their own lobby...

College Parents of America

Visit [www.collegeparents.org](http://www.collegeparents.org)

## Parents are involved!

88% will accompany their child on campus visits

85% will help their child decide to which schools to apply

77% are heavily involved in their child's selection of a college

69% expect to help draft their child's college application

49% expect to arrange for a test prep course or tutoring

## What do students say?

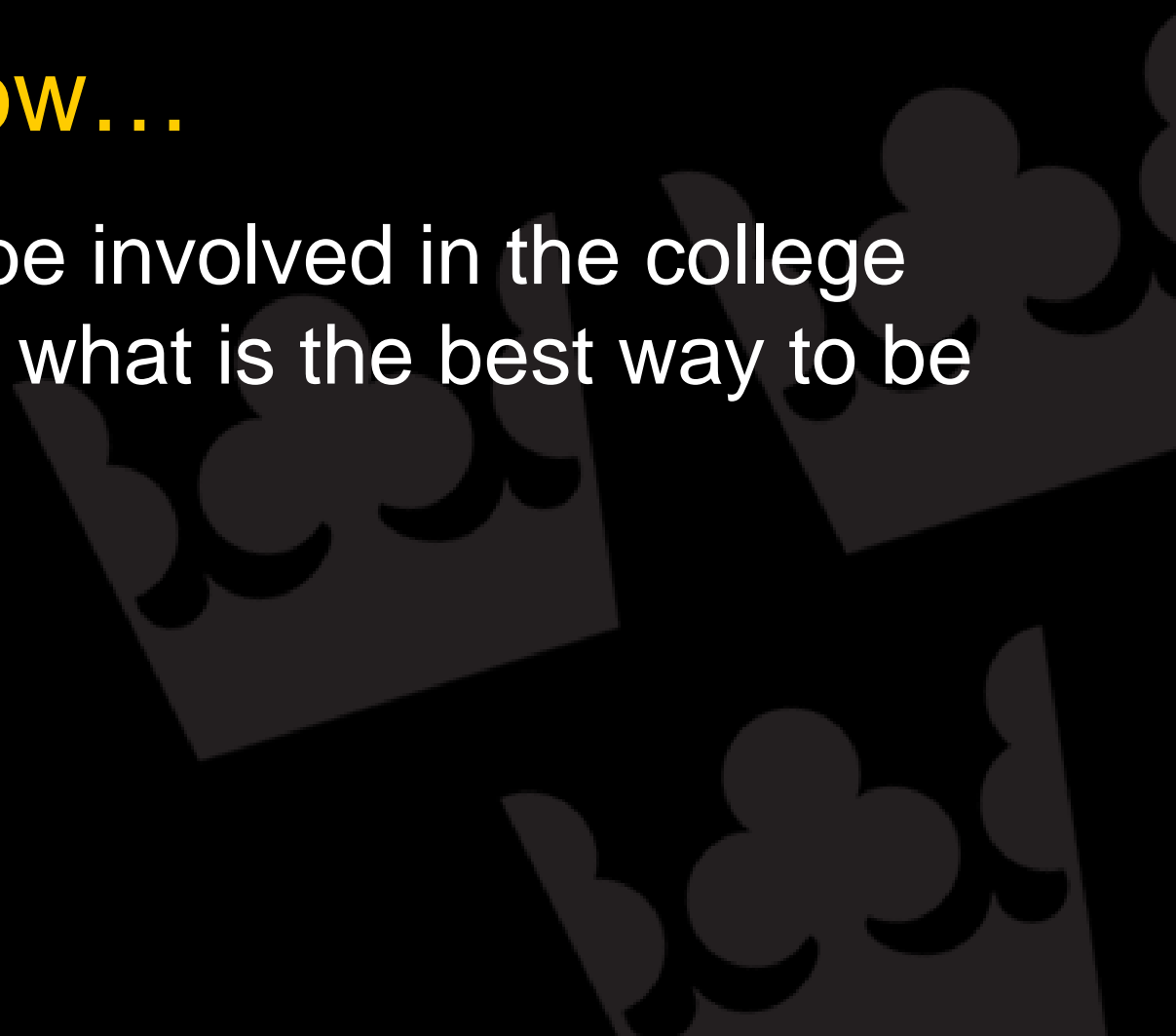
25% -parents were "overly involved to the point that their involvement was either annoying or embarrassing."

13% -parents were not involved at all.

Experience, Inc. Study

## This we know...

Parents will be involved in the college decision, but what is the best way to be involved?



## Ten Ways to Help Your Child Become Self-Reliant

- Encourage Public Speaking
- Practice Negotiation
- Model Time Management and Organizational Skills
- Teach Self-Sufficiency
- Encourage Independence at School

- Listen With an Open Mind
- Provide Structure
- Remember That Every Story Has Two Sides
- Teach Self-Respect
- Teach Logical Conflict Resolution

## The Campus Visit

Insist that your child take charge:

- Decide where to visit. Check out the virtual tour beforehand.
- Call and make the appointment
- Introduce themselves upon arrival

## Campus Visit Tips

Inject a dose of fun into the campus visit experience:

- Revel in the time together. Plan for down time.
- Try to visit when school is in session.
- Pare down the itinerary: no more than two schools per day and three days at a time.
- Leave the siblings behind.
- Keep quiet on the tour.
- Use time in the car or at dinner to discern your child's feelings about a school.
- Suggest they jot down a few notes.

## While on a college campus:

- Connect with several students on the college visit...not just the admission tour guide.
- Eavesdrop on conversations in the caf.
- Ask to see the Placement Office or Career Center.
- Clarify where first-year students will live. Is it the fancy residence hall you were shown on your tour?
- Ask tough questions: Crime stats. Underage drinking.
- Read fliers posted on bulletin boards.
- Trust your **gut** feeling about a campus.

## So what is a parent to do?

Back off.

Encourage your child's independence. Refrain from coming to the rescue. Listen to them. Allow them to come to you instead of getting involved on your own. Let your student know that you have faith in their ability to succeed

Go over college information with them but allow them to steer you in the right direction.

Permit them to make their own decisions without giving your advice first.

Offer to go over their resume or application—but only after they have completed it themselves.

## Tips

Step back. Really listen to your kids. Let them have their own discovery.

Set up an “application station.” Use a small filing cabinet containing folders for each school. Index cards highlighting important deadlines can be helpful as can an oversized calendar from Staples.

Go buy a pizza.

## Questions for a healthier dialogue

What are you thinking about?

What have you seen that you like?

Where did kids like you go last year?

Big or Little? Urban or Rural or Small town?

Don't begin the dialogue too early

## Do's

Learn about the process

Discuss restrictions up front

Remind your child of deadlines

Listen. Offer advice (if asked!)

Be your child's cheerleader

## Don'ts

Don't limit choices based on money.

Don't nag.

Don't make decisions for your child.

## Words of Wisdom

Empower your son or daughter to drive the college selection process; Share the front seat, but

**Don't grab the steering wheel!**

## Additional Resources

Newsweek article entitled "[The Fine Art of Letting Go.](#)"

Lutheran College Research

<http://www.lutherancolleges.org/parents/>

Gustavus Parent Link

<http://admission.gustavus.edu/admissions/choose/parents.asp>

## Contact Information

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