

Minutes Counseling Advisory Committee

February 18, 2016

-- posted by CAC co-chair, Allison Smith Gordon

Book Discussion - "How to Raise an Adult" by Julie Lythcott-Haims
led by Resource Counselor Erika Huck

Julie Lythcott-Haims served as Dean of Freshmen and Undergraduate Advising at Stanford University. A mother of two teenagers, she has spoken and written widely on the phenomenon of helicopter parenting.

(SPECIAL NOTE - For parents who missed this meeting, Whitman is offering an evening book discussion:

Book Discussion -- *How to Raise an Adult*

Tues., March 15, 7:30 PM in the Whitman Media Center)

In her role as Dean at Stanford, author Julie Lythcott-Haims noticed that students, while academically prepared for college, lacked basic life skills needed on the road to independence. She attributes this to:

1. More protective parenting (helicopter parenting)
2. More school work that takes up lots of student time
3. Self-esteem movement (everyone gets a trophy)
4. Creation of the "playdate" where children's interaction is scheduled and supervised by parents
5. Cell phones ("longest umbilical cord" in the history of the world allows constant communication between parent and child)

The window during child development where children are open to independence is rather narrow, so it is important for parents to take

advantage of this opportunity (really young children need and want to be dependent on parents; teens and young adults may crave the dependence because it makes their lives easier)

Helicopter parent – hovering over all aspects of the child’s life in a manner that counters parent responsibility to raise the child towards a life of independence; borne of love

On college campuses, college administrators are noticing that students are incapable of making decisions, seeking opportunities, or problem-solving without the involvement or advice from a parent. This is bad for the student and bad for the parents: over-involved parents risk harming the mental health of their child.

Children need freedoms. When parents intervene in their lives, it sends children the message that they are incapable of handling things on their own and erodes their self-confidence.

Parents act like concierge: organizing the child’s schedule, over-helping with schoolwork, chauffeuring them to all activities, acting as personal assistant, etc. This leaves children unable to think for themselves and makes them believe they are the center of the universe (really bad for their mental health).

Some points to remember:

Parents should picture their child as they first begin to walk. Toddlers are unsteady on their feet, bump into things, and fall down frequently. This pattern is the same for other developmental milestones throughout the child’s life. If parents carry the toddler, the child never learns to walk.

Similarly, if parents constantly intervene during other milestones, children won't learn to make decisions, cope with problems, or take care of themselves.

Allow your student to experience consequences and failures, particularly on low-level activities (e.g., if they forget something, don't bring it to school)

Social discomfort is not the same as "bullying." The "bullying" term is overused and some social discomfort during a child's development is normal and part of the growing-up process. Children need to learn to handle this discomfort. Parents should intervene only if the pattern persists or child is experiencing harm.

School alone should not be your child's job. Make sure they do household chores and learn to do things for themselves.

Examples of things your middle-schooler should be able to do:

- Stay home alone
- Make a purchase at a store
- Work washer and dryer; fold and put away laundry
- Plan and prepare a meal, including using the stove
- Read labels
- Use basic hand tools (screwdriver, hammer, pliers, etc.)

Examples of some failures/disappointments they should experience:

- Not being included in an invitation to a party
- Not making a team
- Death of a pet
- Working hard and still not getting a good grade
- Getting along with a teacher they don't like

Examples of things a teen should be able to do before college:

- Talk to strangers to get assistance or ask directions
- Make a doctor's appointment and fill out the forms
- Time-manage their responsibilities and obligations
- Handle money, including interacting with a bank to open an account or deposit/withdraw money
- Handle interpersonal problems without calling/texting Mom and Dad
- Find their way around a new place
- Use public transportation

Particularly in our area, parents falsely see college as the end point. Your goal is not to get your child into a great college; your goal is to raise a child who becomes a responsible adult.

Parents Remember – your job is to put yourself out of a job!