

### **Can a Loving Parent Help Too Much?**

Many of us feel fortunate to be part of families with pretty terrific kids (and pretty terrific parents). This is almost always a good thing. Every once in a while, a situation comes my way that makes me think, "Can a loving parent help too much?"

Our children learn from their accomplishments and they learn from their struggles. We share those times as part of the wonderful journey that is parenting. When they are doing well and we help them a little from time to time, that is a positive part of parenting. When they are struggling and we help them a little from time to time, that is also positive and important.

What if they are struggling and we are tempted to help them a lot? You could argue that if they are struggling, they need more from us. In some cases this is certainly true. Children with significant problems or disabilities almost always need more help from their parents than other children. However, children who do not have those kinds of "extra needs" might be struggling because of effort issues: 1) poor attitude, 2) a shortage of perseverance, or 3) a lack of appreciation for the importance of the connection between hard work and reward.

Here's the rub. If a child falls behind on assignments, doesn't study enough for a test, and is in danger of getting a disappointing report card, the parent may be tempted to intervene in some way to prevent the disappointing report card from happening. Or if a child doesn't practice very much for their sport (or their art or their music interest) the coach (or moderator) might not play them as much as another child, or they might not get their desired position. These are probably best thought of as "good things" for the child, even though at the moment they don't seem like "good things" at all.

I worry more about the student who is rescued than the student who receives a disappointing grade, even if the student misses out on an opportunity as a result of the poor grade. The rescued students are usually the ones who end up with the low self-esteem because they are less likely to learn from their mistakes and change. The student who is permitted to experience the natural consequences of their actions, even though temporarily hurtful, are more likely to "get it," step up to the plate, shoulder their responsibilities in a new way and earn a heightened self-esteem from their own sense of pride in their accomplishments.

If you step back from the feelings of the moment, what is happening is that the child is getting accurate feedback connecting what they get for what they put in. If parents try to rescue their children from the circumstances of their own creation, we may prevent them from learning important lessons.