

Hecht: Parents, stay off the helicopter!

Pam J. Hecht , WNC Parent contributor Published 6:00 a.m. ET Dec. 10, 2018



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

When my son was in second grade, I got in trouble at school. It was a “serious matter,” his teacher said.

As I carefully wedged myself into the kid-sized chair across from her desk, she gave me the evil eye and fumed, “I’m very disappointed with your behavior.”

“I didn’t do it,” I blurted out blindly.

Turns out, I was guilty: busted for doing my kid’s homework, accused of being an out-of-control helicopter parent and told to lay off homework that wasn’t mine.

I tried to explain: It was a lark, a joke, a one-time crime. My typically upstanding and scholarly 8-year-old and I had laughed about it.

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Unfortunately, the teacher didn’t see the humor in the situation. Apparently, my little partner in crime told the class about it, the other children started sobbing in envy, and the rest of the instructional day was a wash.

Which explains the mysteriously icy stares I received from several parents the next day.

Can’t a parent indulge in an innocent prank every once in a while?

'Hey Pam, be a helicopter parent'

Meanwhile, apparently, the educational world now WANTS me to be a helicopter parent. At parent open houses, teachers excitedly crack the code on how we can digitally track homework assignments, grades and the number of times they sneeze in class, among other things. After successfully completing Parental Snooping & Interfering 101, we are officially licensed to become prying, meddling buttinskies.

Shamefully, I’ve failed at the task. The simple reason is this: I’ve already gone through school. Why would I want to do it again? In fact, back in the day, I was responsible (with occasional parental prodding) for keeping up with my own education.

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Recently, when one of my son’s teachers asked the group of parents whether they had ever logged into their child’s account on an espionage mission, I was the only one without a hand raised. All eyes were on me, the Bad Parent. The teacher, alarmed, handed me a paper with instructions.

Sure, I check in with my kid periodically and let him know I care and that school is a priority. I ensure that conditions are as conducive as possible to keeping up with his schoolwork. I trust him to handle tasks he’s ready for, so he’ll feel confident enough to trust himself. And if he genuinely needs help, I’m there.

Sometimes, bad things happen

But if he wants to wait until the night before it’s due to crack open a particularly challenging and lengthy homework assignment, I may have to suck it up and let him learn that bad things might happen.

During quiet time at the after-school program where I work, I ask if anyone needs help with homework. Sometimes they do. One day, after the usual barrage of complaints about the evil institution of homework, I mentioned that I, too, have homework from time to time. Unfortunately, it was uncovered that I didn’t have any homework on that particular day, so one astute child asked me if I wanted to do his.

As much as I wanted to (it was editing an essay — the kind of homework I actually like), I decided I'd better not go down THAT road again.

Pam J. Hecht is a writer, instructor and mother of two (but not necessarily in that order). Reach her at pamjh8@gmail.com.

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