

'O' Level 2013

Parents often believe that it is better to be safe than sorry. Do you consider young people to be too protected?

"As a parent, it is my job to protect my children from everything that is bad for them!" This oft spoken statement contains sentiments that many parents can attest to. Indeed, it is only natural for parents to feel the need to shield their children from pain, which can in turn result in a safe, nurturing environment for youth to grow up in. However, these protective instincts can often go overboard, resulting in youths struggling to be independent and develop social skills. Overall, I believe that young people are indeed overprotected by overly cautious parents.

Many youths show a lack of independence and confidence, a result of excessive insulation by parents. When young people are shielded from making mistakes that could teach them valuable lessons, they tend to be unsure of themselves and of how to navigate life without help. Some parents, for example, drive their teenagers around to every single appointment, from school to hockey training to tuition, instead of allowing them to navigate public transport. Some parents are even known to write to university administrations, demanding to know why their kids' grades are poor, even though as young adults they ought to already have autonomy over their own learning. In 2019, Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said that helicopter parenting has resulted in "a loss of a sense of individuality or independence, and greater stress" on children. Indeed, there are many parents today who cannot let go of their children long enough for them to develop the autonomy and self-reliance which will get them through life's ups and downs.

Some young people also suffer from overly cautious parenting which can affect their social development. Understanding how people work, who to get along with and who to avoid as well as when to speak or listen are all part of learning how to coexist in a community. When parents try to shield their children from making 'bad' friends they sometimes overdo it, resulting in the child struggling with socialisation. The mother of a classmate of mine sits in on every student discussion involving a group project, as she worries over whether her son David's grades will suffer without her purview. David has next to no friends, naturally, as nobody our age is keen on working with his mom on class projects. Some parents demand to know everything about every single friend or acquaintance and keep a close eye on these interactions. With this type of armoured parenting, youth will most certainly struggle with growing or thriving in social settings.

Conversely, it can be argued that a parent's desire to be cautious is rooted in love for their children, and that their protectiveness can be beneficial to a young person's growth. Solicitous acts include the concern displayed by parents when their teenagers encounter their first heartbreak, the advice they can confer on picking the right schools or even the parental control applications applied on electronic devices that prevent a young person from going down the wrong path. As the world grows increasingly complex both off and online, so do the dangers that lurk around most corners, ranging from scam artists to strangers online with ill intent. It can be argued that parents who choose to protect their children in this complex world are not overdoing it, and that some young people perhaps need the extra padding.

All in all, despite the best intentions of parents who choose to be protective of their children, I believe that young people are best left somewhat to their own devices in order to develop well. Youth who are overprotected showcase a lack of self-reliance and a proclivity towards



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overdependence on others. While it is true that some parents safeguard their children in a way that is nurturing and helpful to their growth, I believe that most parents who do so end up affecting kids' social development in a negative way. Perhaps a parent's mantra would sound better thus: "As a parent, it is my job to guide my children through life whenever I can, but have the wisdom to know when I can't!"