

A new generation of kids has led to a new generation of parents today – a sign of the times. This new generation of parents started in 1982 with the Tylenol scare. From that point, parents prioritized the safety and future of their children, but the bad news is that parents didn't know where to draw the line. We have padded, loved, funded and defended our children. We consider them our trophies by protecting and perfecting them, but still trying to be a good parent. Parents often can't draw the line between mothering and smothering; fathering and bothering; yet, this is the most 'educated' generation of parents in US. History.

The real issue is not the education of parents, but issues of the heart. Most parents slip into habits that aren't so healthy. In his research, Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders, has spotted a handful of damaging parenting styles that have plagued our culture over the last decade.

The Snowplow Parent -- In 2002, social scientists coined the term "helicopter parent" – observations of parents hovering over their kids, working to make sure they got every imaginable advantage. Writings about this parenting style can be found in many journals, but the term has now been renamed as the "snowplow" parent. These parents push, negotiate, intimidate and even manipulate others to ensure that doors open for their children, and that no negative incident affects their self-esteem or diminishes their chances at being accepted. "Snowplow" parents create unfair environments and unrealistic scenarios that students must recover from when they enter the real world as adults.

The Problem: These parents don't allow their kids the privilege of learning to fail and persevere.

The Issue: These "snowplow" parents may possess a controlling spirit in which they find it difficult to trust others to deal with their children that they care for, tending to be over-functioning and even micromanaging in style. They mean well, but they must learn to trust the process. As parents, we must switch our focus from "controlling the circumstances" to "connecting with the kids" and equipping them to be successful.

The Karaoke Parent -- These parents want to look and sound like their kids – dress, talk and even be cool like their child. They hunger to be a "buddy" to their kids and stay "cool" and "hip" so that they will be able to relate to their children. These parents work to create an image, but don't offer their kids the boundaries and authority they desperately need. Some of these parents will even go to lengths of allowing and purchasing alcohol for their underage children hoping to gain trust. Many children of these Karaoke Parents grow up needing a therapist in their late twenties because they are angry at their parents.

The Problem: They don't provide their children the clear parameters that build security and esteem.

The Issue: Many times parents and teachers follow the karaoke style because of their own emotional insecurities. Kids don't need parents to be cool; they need them to be real.

The Dry Cleaner Parent -- Just as you take your wrinkled, soiled clothes to the dry cleaners to have them cleaned and pressed by professionals, it is easy to drop our children off with experts to "fix" them. These "dry cleaner" parents don't feel equipped to raise their kids. Although the home environment may have spoiled or damaged their child's character, they hope a school, counselor or church youth group can fix them. Parenting is a learning experience and one of the most important tasks.

The Problem: Dry Cleaner parents don't furnish their kids the mentoring and authentic face-to-face time they require.

The Issue: For some of these parents, connecting with kids is just not their specialty. They don't feel adequate for the parenting task, it is too much work for them to connect with their kids, and they hide behind the fact that they are busy with other priorities.

The Volcano Parent -- These parents burst into a rage if they are backed into a corner and erupt like a volcano. Life has not turned out as they planned, so they write papers for their children, do homework, apply for jobs or colleges. This is similar to the snowplow parent, but for a different reason – they are attempting to live out their un-lived life through their child. They desperately want their child to make it, because that kid is their last hope of leaving some sort of name or legacy for themselves.

The Problem: These parents have unrealized dreams from their past.

The Issue: The child represents the best way for the adult parent to accomplish their dream from the past. These parents must address their own emotional health and deal with their own issues so that they don't further damage their child. Children have a much better chance of growing up if their parents have done so first.

Two New Parenting Styles -- Social scientists are now measuring the newest population of kids – Generation Z. These youth have not seen a day without social media and don't need adults to get information, yet they experience the same level of anxiety as a psychiatric patient did in the 1950s.

The Ostrich Parent -- Too many parents simply don't have the time or patience to understand their teens, so they disengage, similar to an ostrich sticking their head in the sand. Maybe out of fear - they don't want to know what is happening with their child. They figure what they don't know won't hurt them, but many times it is hurting their child.

The Problem: Kids are left to navigate this new world of anxiety and social media without a guide.

The Issue: Many of these parents are simply preoccupied with their own lives, are too afraid or too busy to ask about their child's, are too enthralled with their own social media feeds and seem oblivious to the needs of their child.

The Owl Parent -- This parent symbolizes a completely different approach to life. They are alert and observe what's happening all around. They possess the wisdom to address dangerous patterns in kids, helping them to rise above addictive behavior, risk aversion, self-absorption, anxiety, depression and entitlement.

Today, more than ever, kids need healthy, engaged parents leading their homes. Parents need to become healthy mentors to their kids as they lead lives worth imitating. Stop spending time preparing the path for your child and start preparing the child for the path.

Contact your local Twin Creeks Extension District office in Norton, Decatur or Sheridan counties to take advantage of the benefits of participating as a 4-H member that stresses positive youth development. #TrueLeaders; #4-HGrowsHere.

Information in this article has been adapted from Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders.

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Article Header

“Parenting Styles – Reality Speaks”

“Chasing Clovers”

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