

# Kids may lessen anxiety if they can take some risks

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“Helicopter parenting” has gotten a bad rap for producing children who leave the nest with few real-world skills. But what if its drawbacks go beyond kids’ inability to, say, find a summer job or do chores?

Psychologist Anne Marie Albano suggests that managing your child’s life could have another drawback — it could set the stage for a serious problem with anxiety.

Albano is a Columbia University psychologist whose research focuses on children and anxiety. Her work suggests that kids who don’t take risks or experience occasional distress are more likely to be anxious.

Letting children get scared runs counter to parental instincts — after all, isn’t protecting them part of the parental job description?

Not so fast, warns Albano in a new TedMed Talk. Participating in child’s anxiety cycle doesn’t do them any favors. According to Albano, the best way to inoculate kids against anxiety is to step out of the anxiety cycle.

Here’s how it works: A child has a hard time. Parents can’t tolerate their child’s distress, so they step in and help. The kid doesn’t get the chance to develop resilience or coping skills, so they become more anxious. Repeat.

“If parents and key figures in a child’s life can help the child, assist them to confront their fears and learn how to problem-solve, then it is more likely that the children are going to develop their own internal coping mechanisms for managing their anxiety,” Albano says.

Parents should stay calm, validate the child’s feelings, then help them plan how to confront the situation, Albano advises — and then stand back and let them deal with the problem themselves. It’s not a one-size-fits-all solution — Albano emphasizes that this tactic works only for run-of-the-mill frustrations, not situations like bullying. But developing the ability to watch your child suffer temporarily can clear the way for something amazing: The gratification of seeing that child blossom as they experience a sense of their own efficacy and ability. Watch the talk at [bit.ly/kidanxiety](https://bit.ly/kidanxiety).