

The Hurt and Damage Caused by Propeller Parents **by John Hannon**

Over the last ten years there have been numerous articles written about so-called helicopter parents. These are the well intended, but often misguided, moms and dads who call college professors to argue about their child's grade and then call HR at their kids first job to weigh in on salary negotiations and benefits options.

Although they hinder their child's worldly development, most of what these parents do is relatively harmless, as they are frequently appeased or just dismissed by increasingly thick skinned administrators.

To fight fire with fire, former helicopter parents are getting frustrated and going into attack mode for their kids. This new breed of parents is being referred to "curling parents" (sweep everything out of the way), "lawnmower parents" (mow everything down), or "Blackhawk Down parents" (blow everything and everybody up).

Certainly these people pose problems for their own kids - and they are a pain in the butt for the people they think are messing with their little Johnny or Suzy. But, for the most part, these combatants are strangers in a temporary relationship.

For my money, the most problematic parents these days is another breed I'll call "propeller parents." These people create conflict and often blow up emerging and established friendships. They cause irreparable pain. That's why they need to be identified and reformed - if possible. If they can't be reformed, they need to be shunned and ignored.

Sadly, I have witnessed a rapid increase in the number and severity of propeller parents. Ten years ago they were in single digits at any given travel hockey birth year. Their numbers seem to have doubled or tripled now.

In a nutshell, they are the people who inject themselves into everybody's business. They meddle in the team they are on. They meddle in every other team of kids the same age as their kid. They meddle in every team they come in contact with.

What do they do?

They stir the pot. They wreak havoc. They plot. They plant disinformation. They delight in bad news.

They talk about the Jones' kid to the Smiths and the Smiths' kid to the Jones. They run to the coach with stuff about every player and parent. They talk smack about everybody's kid behind their back.

Eventually, someone gets offended. Then someone gets mad. Then things escalate.

It all starts when Mrs. Jones tells her husband, "Mr. Propeller told her that Mrs. Smith said that Johnny Jones is a selfish player who should be replaced next year."

Mr. Jones confronts Mr. Smith.

Mrs. Jones stops talking to Mrs. Smith.

The couples stop going out to dinner and sit at opposite ends of the table when the team goes out to lunch in between games.

The Smith boy and the Jones boy (who are in the dark about all the tension) stop going over to each others houses to play.

Mr. Propeller keeps blabbing his mouth far and wide. “Man, that Patterson kid is awful,” he says.

More and more friendships are fractured.

The Jones kid moves to a new team the following year. So do the Pattersons and the Jaworskis. They are feuding now, too.

Now turn the clock forward five years.

The Jones and Smiths have not talked to each other in years. Last week the Jones kid checked the Smith kid from behind by accident. The Smiths jumped to the conclusion that it was confirmation of everything Mr. Propeller had told them about the Jones family. Mr. Smith went off on the Jones family in the stands during the game and in the lobby afterward. Thankfully, the Smith boy was fine.

Is Mr. Propeller there to see all this?

No.

Well, where is Mr. Propeller’s kid playing now?

Nowhere, Paddy Propeller quit hockey. He is more interested in girls and cars and partying.

And where is Mr. Propeller?

Not at the rinks. He’s at Sabres games and hanging out at his favorite watering hole. He’s on the beach in Florida in February.

Too bad Mr. Propeller isn’t around to see all the severe and permanent hurt and damage he left in his wake.

Maybe he’d be ashamed of himself. Then again, maybe not.