

THE MOM'S GUIDE TO  
**SURVIVING**  
WEST POINT

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## CHAPTER 3

### *Helicopters* *(Letting go)*

When I took my firstborn (not my cadet) to the premier educational institution in our home state of Georgia, orientation was as much for the parents as for the students. I sat in the semi-darkness awaiting the presentation. Suddenly, I thought we were under attack! The sound of dozens of helicopters filled the air! The orientation session was titled "How to Avoid Being a Helicopter Parent." This was a new term for me.

I learned there are two types of helicopter parents: 1) Those who hover constantly, ready to help, fix, navigate, negotiate and basically save; and 2) Those who rapidly sweep in for the rescue. That's my job, right? I've done several versions of "mommy-fix-it" since becoming a mom. Apparently this college thought 18-year-olds were capable (ha!) of dealing with the situations life could throw at them.

They were right. If we back off, our kids will figure things out. They have to.

West Point is a "no-fly zone" for helicopter parents. It's not that our kids don't need or even want our advice—they

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might. It's that they are adults and members of the United States Army. They may not look or act like grownups to us, but they are. We do them a terrible disservice when we do not allow them to figure out problems for themselves.

Sure, there are times we do need to "mom." If my cadet were injured and in the hospital, you better believe I would either be calling the doctor or flying up there—or both. Plebe year, as a Southern born and raised boy, my son was freezing his keister off in October. He called and implored me to send long underwear ASAP. I could've sent him websites to order online, or directed him to the PX; however, I sent the underwear.

When he asked how to get an absentee ballot, I wanted to fill out the paperwork and have it sent to him. Instead, I sent a link to the county website and told him he could read about it and figure it out. I was so pleased when I learned he had actually done it and had voted! You have to decide how much you're willing to do.

For almost any West Point-related issue, however, there is already a protocol. It's called "the Chain of Command." Cadets learn about the importance of "the Chain" on R-Day. Those who don't follow it end up with issues. For example, a New Cadet with some blistered feet needs to tell the Chain. If the Chain doesn't know what's going on, they cannot help cadets with whatever the problem is.

With the technology resources we have, cadets are frequently asking moms what to do instead of asking the Chain. Perhaps they don't want to be viewed as ignorant. They are in this position, though, to learn to depend on the Chain of Command. One day, their subordinates will learn to trust them as well, as they become part of the Chain.

### *Chapter 3: Helicopters*

Here are some examples of things that can go wrong at West Point and what to do:

- Your cadet loses his wallet: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet loses uniform pieces: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet's flight is going to be late: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet misses the train: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet doesn't know where sick call is: Contact Chain.
- Your cadet needs Oreo Balls: Contact Mom.