



ARE YOU BROODING OVER YOUR BROOD?

If the daily rigours of parenting make you as if like you're under a dark cloud, here's how to find a little sunshine.

When my nine-year-old daughter Lucy recently asked if she could walk to the corner store alone, my immediate response was “no”. Lucy pushed and prodded and protested. She was eager to buy a chocolate bar with her allowance money, was bored hanging around the house and clearly wanted a grown-up adventure. I remembered how, at that age, my mom would regularly send me out to the store to buy milk or pasta for that night's dinner, or (egad!) a pack of DuMaurier Lights. I took a deep breath, told Lucy to bring the dog with her and tried very hard not to think of all the bad things that could happen. Twenty minutes later she arrived home, happy as a clam. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Since when did allowing your kid to go to the store alone feel like such a daring act?

SMOTHERING, MOTHERING

It begins when kids are infants and we load them up with intellectually stimulating toys. It progresses through preschool when we pick their friends by arranging playdates, and stretches into grade school when we sign them up for a host of organized

after-school activities. It can continue into their teens and 20s when parents fill out their university applications, give them wake-up calls to ensure they show up on time for work and welcome them home with open arms when they are adults and can't manage on their own.

Raising kids this way can feel more like product development than human development. We want to produce the most well adjusted, smart, well rounded and successful progeny possible, but we're also producing anxiety-ridden parents.

Parents today worry more about their kids than any previous generation and our anxiety about our kids is one of the top reasons Canadians are seeking therapy, says Dr. John Service, a director with the Canadian Psychological Association. There are a slew of reasons for this rising tide of anxious parents:

- The stigma about anxiety and other mental health problems is lessening and people are more likely to seek help.
- Canadians are having smaller families, so there's a more intense concentration of

parental effort being showered on fewer children.

- The increase in the diagnosis of learning disorders and behavioural issues in children is prompting their stressed-out parents to seek help.
- Our generation's relative affluence and freedom from crises such as world wars or the Depression has left us free to focus all our worries on our children.

“As well, parents are more isolated from their natural extended family networks than they used to be so they rely more on what they hear in the media about parenting,” says Dr. Service, who points out that sensational headlines about events that are relatively rare – such as child abductions or Internet entrapment, can cause overworrying. “Even if these things aren't happening in their community, parents are concerned.”

Dr. Service says anxiety is the most pervasive of all mental health disorders and it can affect parents in many ways – from causing sleeplessness to an inability to make decisions.