

Empty Nest Syndrome

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Eighteen years went by in a blink of an eye. It seems just like yesterday that I brought you home from the hospital and now I am packing the car with the sheets, towels, a quilt and other essentials that I ordered for your college dorm room. I am worried, did I prepare you for life on your own? Will you do your laundry, change your sheets, eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, be on time for your classes, and be safe? It seems that I was on "parent duty" 24/7 doing things for you day in, day out and I am feeling anxious about how you will manage and how I will manage now that you are off on this new adventure. Truth be told, I am sad wondering what is next for me.

If any of the above resonates with you, you are not alone. Mental Health professionals recognize it as Empty Nest Syndrome. A quick Internet search of Empty Nest Syndrome brings up a slew of articles and YouTube videos acknowledging this phenomena and coaching parents through feelings of depression, stress, anxiety, and worry.

So what can you do? First, before the inevitable moment arrives when your child goes off to college or takes a gap year or travels abroad build their life skills. Teach them how to do laundry, use mass transit, manage their money, grocery shop, recognize scams, and be handy with a set of tools. You'll feel better and less anxious if you know you have invested time in helping them to be independent.

Discuss your and their expectations of how to keep in touch. Experts agree that daily phone calls aren't always the best and you don't want to be that helicopter parent monitoring their every action. Brief texts, weekly video chats or a few phone calls during the week should suffice to assure you that your child is doing well and giving your child the opportunity to talk with you.

Remember they will be missing you and their routines as well.

Look forward to and enjoy the college's Parents Weekend, but don't go overboard planning activities and bringing supplies. Ask them what they need and what they would like to do before your arrival. Let them take the helm and plan the weekend, they may surprise you with their creativity. The weekend also lets you meet other parents who may also be grappling with being empty nesters. Suddenly, you have a new set of friends experiencing a similar situation and understanding this life change.

As an empty nester you must think about yourself and what your life looks like without being a full-time parent. Mental Health professionals suggest the following:

- If married, reconnect with your spouse, spend some quality time together. While parenting you may have neglected this relationship with all the other responsibilities you had.
- Build a new routine for the day, week, and/or month.
- Reconnect with old friends.
- Make new friends by taking courses through an Adult Community School or a local college.
- Start a book group or plan monthly dinners out with friends.
- Challenge yourself with new activities, volunteering, or putting your skills to good use with a new job.
- Renew interest in an old hobby like painting, jewelry making, gardening or develop a new hobby that gives you pleasure.
- Keep healthy with a fitness routine and balanced diet.
- If able, change your routine by taking a vacation, planning some day trips on the weekends, go hiking in the state parks, or expand your knowledge by visiting museums and outdoor exhibits.
- If you are feeling depressed and or are overwhelmed with sadness, seek out a mental health professional at a clinic or in private practice to talk through your feelings and concerns.

Remember, you raised your child to be independent and to thrive. As they grow up you have a wonderful opportunity to develop a whole new relationship with them.

Being a parent to an adult child is exciting with new challenges along the way.
Embrace the moment and the adventures that will come your way!