

The Empty Nest Gives Parents New Options

As you return from helping your youngest move into her college dorm room, it might finally hit you — there are no more kids running around the house, tying up the phone line or challenging you to a game of one-on-one basketball. This is it. Your job as a parent on the front lines of your child's life is complete.



Facing the prospect of having an empty house, sometimes known as an empty nest, can be scary. How you cope depends greatly on what you have done to psychologically and physically prepare. "You actually start thinking about it before you take your kids to college," said Karen McCune, a mother of two twenty-something children. "You start dreading it and there's a time when you and your child are butting heads. It almost seems they feel there has to be conflict so the separation is easier."

What to Expect

According to experts, what bothers most new empty nesters is the silence. At first, the quiet might be great. Then, gradually they can start to feel lonely. Many empty nest parents experience an initial lag time. During this period, their new levels of spare time and energy become evident, as does the fact that they've not yet redeveloped the social relationships or leisure interests to which they can devote this time and energy.

"Oh my God! Was it quiet!" McCune recalled. "The phone never rang. It was disturbing. Remember that we were going from a senior year of high school where everything is going on and it's very frantic. Then it just stops. It's too stark. It's like going from black to white."

Another challenge for empty nest couples can be marital difficulties. The divorce statistics for couples whose children have left home are sobering, as husbands and wives who for nearly two decades have diverted their attention to child-rearing become aware that they don't get along like they used to. Empty nest couples need to concentrate on building new relationships with one another in order to avoid this pitfall.

The key, says McCune, is to begin dating one another. "We started dating before our children left," McCune said. "We didn't want to look up, after the kids were gone, and have problems. We wanted it be like it was in B.C., or Before Children."

Be Prepared

Thinking about what to do after your children have moved away can be an important part of avoiding the empty nest blues. Instead of looking at the negatives of the children's departure, plan in advance some activities or events that will help you with the transition.

"What really helped us was we started thinking about what it was going to be like before they were actually gone," McCune said. "We started cultivating friendships and talking about different activities we could do. We started seeing movies in the middle of the week, and

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I don't have to cook anymore if I don't want to. It is great."

One of the things McCune said helped her cope with the empty house was the bonding with former high school parents. Calling themselves the "Empty Nest Dinner Club," a group of parents, who had interacted around their children's high school events, meet and discuss their experiences now that the children have moved away. "It's great because we're still sharing our experiences, and it's keeping us social," McCune said. "If we didn't do this, we would all just fade away from each other."

Keeping in Touch

Kathy Bergstrom knows how to keep in touch with her daughter — without being intrusive. Bergstrom has daily contact with her 26-year-old daughter who lives nearly a thousand miles away in Los Angeles. "The key is to have a separation, have your own life, and then just try to be friends with your children when they move out," Bergstrom said. "I try not to be needy, but just show interest in my daughter's life and have common experiences to talk about."

Besides exchanging a daily email, the mother and daughter also speak by telephone almost every day, just to talk about their lives. Bergstrom keeps up with her daughter's life by learning about the younger one's new friends and checking on her "grand-dog" Prudence. "We like to have our lives interchanged; it's how we continue to care for one another," Bergstrom said. "We're also planning a vacation together. It's nice to have a daughter that you really like as an adult. It makes it so easy to stay in touch."

Both McCune and Bergstrom said one of the important ways they stayed in touch with their children was to have a scheduled time to have them call. "She usually calls us every Sunday night at 9 p.m.," McCune said. "You actually start looking forward to Sunday night to catch up."

Conclusion

The day-to-day routines of parents may change drastically with their children's departures. For empty nesters, questions may arise as to how personal fulfillment can be derived, how evolved marital

relationships can remain strong or how parents can play integral roles in the lives of adult children. But while certain roles and routines are subsiding for empty nesters, others are just beginning. With the proper preparation and perspective, new hobbies and old friends will find their way to the den, marital fires will burn bright and adult children will see their parents as friends and confidants.

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Easy Tips for Hassle-Free Homework

Homework is an important part of a child's education — it extends your child's learning beyond the classroom. Unfortunately, daily assignments can sometimes become a daily hassle for families. But there's a simple way to make dealing with homework a lot easier — by helping your child to develop and utilize good study skills and habits.



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Homework Tips

Hang Up the Phone and Turn Off the Tube

To your child, doing homework while texting a friend or watching television may seem like a way to pack more into the day, however, in the long run it will actually extend homework time. Encourage your child to focus just on homework while he or she is hitting the books — it will help him or her to get done in less time and learn more from the assignment. Getting done earlier means he or she will likely still have plenty of time for leisure and socializing afterwards.

Check the Calendar

Setting up a regular time each day for homework can help to prevent homework hassles. It's best not to schedule homework for immediately after school — your child is likely to be tired and not in the mood to go straight back to the books. Encourage your child to have a snack or get some exercise, then do schoolwork before or shortly after dinner. Sticking to a schedule is a very important part of developing good study habits.

Set a Target

A barrier to doing homework well for many students is that they underestimate the time that will be required to get it completed. Students can find themselves saying, "Nine o'clock? Is this EVER going to get done?" Learning to set realistic time expectations is another important study skill. Parents can help students to review their assignments and estimate the time needed to complete the tasks.

Location, Location, Location

Having the right place to work is another part of developing a good homework strategy. Parents can encourage homework success by establishing a study area. It should be comfortable, well lit, and free of clutter or other major distractions. However, there need not be any further restrictions. If your child likes working at a desk, he should; if your child wants to lie on a pile of pillows, that's ok, too. However, it's generally not a good idea to work on homework in bed because your child may begin to associate the bed with work and stress, which can interrupt sleep patterns.

Get Movin'

Your child doesn't have to be stuck at the desk in order to get the work done. Getting up and walking around the room could end up helping more than you might think. Rhythmic physical activity may help some students grasp and memorize information. An activity like pacing can help with rote memory tasks, such as memorizing a play or the periodic table. The brain begins to associate the movement of the body with the thing that your child is memorizing.



Learn Cooperatively

Your child can learn a lot from his or her friends. Talking out the difficult parts of an assignment or studying for a test with a classmate can sometimes help your child understand better than studying independently. Most likely, each study partner will have different parts of the subject that he or she understands better than the other. Sharing knowledge with one another is bound to help both students.

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Don't Forget Recess

It's just as important to play hard as it is to work hard, especially with homework. The human brain can maintain complete focus on something for only short periods of time. If your child decides to sit in his chair until he memorizes the quadratic formula, even when he isn't getting it, chances are he's not going to remember it the next day. Encourage your child to take that break for 5-15 minutes, stretch and clear his or her mind.



Conclusion

Remember, homework is your child's responsibility, not yours, but parental involvement and support is an important component in your child's development of good study skills and habits. Good study skills will help your child successfully complete his or her schoolwork in less time and with fewer problems — now that's hassle-free homework!

ADHD: Information and Advice for Parents

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the name of a group of behaviors found in many children and adults. People with ADHD have trouble paying attention in school or at home and controlling impulsive or hyperactive behavior. ADHD may contribute to significant problems in relationships, learning and behavior. Below are some tips for helping children cope with ADHD symptoms.



Make a schedule

Children with ADHD need to know exactly when a new activity will start and stop. Set times for:

- Waking up;
- Eating;
- Playing;
- Homework;
- Chores;
- Television;
- Bedtime; and
- Other significant activities.

Post the schedule and explain any changes to the routine in advance.

Always use specific numerical times. For example, if you want your child to do homework for 30 minutes, give him the start and end time such as "Work on your homework from 6 to 6:30."

Make simple house rules

Explain what will happen when rules are obeyed and broken. Write down the rules and their consequences with your child and display them where they can easily be seen.

Make sure your directions are understood

To get your child's attention, look directly into his or her eyes. Talk to your child in a clear, calm voice and explain specifically what you want. Keep directions simple and short. Ask your child to repeat the directions back to you. For difficult tasks, give only one or two directions at a time.

Reward good behavior

Congratulate your child when he or she completes each step of a task or when you notice that he or she is making the effort to behave or follow directions. The little things should be recognized too, such as getting dressed and closing doors quietly.

Be positive

Tell your child what you want rather than what you don't want. Reward your child regularly for good behavior. Use phrases like "I like it when you _____" or "I see that you are really trying hard to be patient. I appreciate that."

Be consistent

Follow the rules you established, and always give appropriate consequences. Structure helps children feel safe. Never make a promise that you don't know you can keep. It's much better to say "I don't know" rather than always answering yes.

Supervise your child

Make sure your child is supervised all the time, especially when around friends. All children get excited when playing with peers, especially children with ADHD. Reward good play behaviors. If your child is with other children his or her age, more adult supervision may be required.

Set a homework routine

Establish a regular time and place without distractions for doing homework. Break homework time into small parts and have breaks.

Focus on effort, not grades

Reward your child when he or she tries to finish schoolwork. You can give extra rewards for earning better grades.

Talk with your child's teachers

Find out how your child is doing at school — in class, at playtime, at lunchtime. Ask for regular progress notes from the teachers.

Help with school activities

School mornings may be very hectic and difficult, so get ready the night before by laying out school clothes and getting the book bag ready.

Identify your child's strengths

Build upon these strengths with positive affirmations and praise so that your child has a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Set aside special time for your child

Constant negative feedback can erode a child's self-esteem but a daily dose of TLC can help strengthen your child's self-worth and confidence.

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