Adjusting to an “Empty Nest” Together

If you are parenting children, especially young children, it can sometimes seem like you will be doing this job forever. After all, depending on the number of kids and how far apart they are, it’s possible to have children at home for well over 25 years! And these days, an increasing number of young people are remaining at home after coming of age...or returning back home after moving out.

Is “Empty Nest Syndrome” Real?

But for most moms and dads, a day will come when the nest is empty and all children have left. This transition has often been portrayed as sad or difficult for parents. You may even hear stories about couples who have been “busy” with the kids for many years, but who now find that they have nothing left in common.

It’s true that this tends to be a time when couples put the focus back on themselves and their relationship. But while studies find that “empty nest syndrome” exists for some, it doesn’t seem to be nearly as common as the media might have you believe.

Many Positive Aspects

As a matter of fact, having one’s children move out can actually be quite positive for parents. A 2002 Australian study found that in general, women’s moods were brighter and their feelings of hassle decreased after the kids left home. And in a 1990 study, the marriages of new “empty nesters” also improved...even seeming a bit like a “second honeymoon.” There may be more time for hobbies and personal activities, which is often a welcome change. And having successfully raised and “launched” a child gives parents a feeling of accomplishment and pride.

Challenges for Some

However, some moms and dads do experience feelings of sadness, emptiness, or loss after children depart. Studies show that this may be more intense for women, particularly those who stayed at home or worked part-time. These feelings also seem to be notably more common when parents feel worried about their kids...for instance, if the children are seen as not having a career path or being “off course.” And the cultural background of the family might matter, too. One study found that parents from cultures where adult children have traditionally remained at home longer had more issues.

Preparing for the Empty Nest

If you anticipate that your own children will soon “fly the coop,” don’t panic. While the situation may feel odd and unfamiliar at first, and you may, of course, miss your kids. But there are many advantages to this phase of life and marriage. After the initial adjustment, you’re likely to enjoy having more free time and more time to devote to the relationship.

If things feel a bit quiet or awkward, though, there are things you can do to reconnect and find your bearings again.

- Rediscover your passions. Remember those hobbies or interests you may not have had time for for a while?
- Look for your support system. You likely know other parents going through the same thing.
• **Seek out new, fun, and different activities with your spouse.** Learning and doing new things together builds passion!

• **Find somewhere to put your energy,** if need be. Maybe there’s a cause you’ve been wanting to volunteer with for years?

• **Date again!** We mean your partner, of course. For some great ideas, check out [101 Fun Dating Ideas](#), and remember to **make date night count.** These **at-home date nights** are great, too, if you don’t feel like going out!

If you and your spouse would like an opportunity to get closer now that your nest is empty, why not consider enrolling in a fun, free class that will help you reconnect? The SMART Couples project is offering ELEVATE, a FREE, research-backed relationship enhancement class for couples, in 5 Florida counties. [Sign up today!](#)

**References:**

Dennerstein, L., Dudley, E., & Guthrie, J. (2002). Empty nest or revolving door? A prospective study of women’s quality of life in midlife during the phase of children leaving and re-entering the home. *Psychological Medicine, 32*, 545–550. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291701004810](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291701004810)
