When the children have left home: adjusting to an empty nest

You have protected and guided your child, comforted and supported them, and prepared your son or daughter to begin the next chapter in their adult life. Chances are you feel both excitement and worry as they venture out on their own.

Whether it's the first or last child leaving home, many parents have difficulty letting go. You may feel a loss of identity or purpose, and even depression once your grown children move out – welcome to Empty Nest Syndrome.



While many young adults continue to live at home, many more move away from home for studies and career – this is something parents need to prepare for.

The best way to handle the transition positively is to recognize that it is normal for parents (and siblings) to have strong emotions when one of the children leaves home. You will need to rearrange and incorporate new routines and activities, as well as new ways to stay in touch with your child.

Parents may feel sad or lost when they no longer need to tend to their child. Consider your empty nest as an opportunity to:

Re-discover old hobbies or develop new interests. Now that you have more free time, why not play the sport you used to love, sing in the church choir again, or finish a project you started years ago? Perhaps you have a goal or interest that was put aside to raise your children like taking classes or getting involved with a fitness trend like enrolling in yoga or going hiking. Now is a great time to commit to a healthier lifestyle.

Re-ignite relationships you may have let slide while raising your family. Studies have long proven that investing in friendships is good for your health. However, being a parent often means putting friendships on the back burner. Take a moment to make a list of five friends or relatives you have been missing, and make time to reconnect with them.

Give back. Getting involved in your community by volunteering for charitable causes you believe in will re-define your role, and offer the chance to meet like-minded people and learn new skills.

Enrich your relationship. While busy being parents, couples often lack the time and energy to invest in being partners. One perk to becoming an Empty Nester is the opportunity to get to know each other again, to reconnect, and to redefine your relationship. Take advantage of the increased time you now have to find old and new activities, big and small, that will give you pleasure in the relationship. If you find that it is difficult to reconnect or perhaps the transition is causing tension think of using your EFAP to support discussion and help you to deal with the situation together.

Embrace technology to stay connected. Of course you miss your child, and being there for the day-to-day ups and downs in his or her life. But you might be surprised to find your relationship becoming even stronger, as you begin to relate to them as adults. Thankfully, communication has never been easier – between Skype, FaceTime and texting, your son or daughter is never more than a few clicks away.

Trust your parenting: your son or daughter is ready. As your child leaves to take on the responsibilities of a study or career, you can take pride in a job well done as they succeed and continue to grow into responsible adults.