

# The Transition of “Empty Nesting”

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So often, the experience of watching a child leave the home is difficult, as it is filled with uncertainties and distance from loved ones. Parents might experience emotional pain, sadness, and loneliness when the child leaves. For others, this may be a positive experience, filled with anticipation and happiness. And some might feel somewhere in between.

Where do you fall on this continuum? Wherever you lie, that is okay! It is important to know that we all cope with transitions differently and at our own pace.

For those of you who are struggling to cope with the emotional distress of knowing your children will be leaving the home, or for those of you who have already watched them leave, there are a few things that are helpful to remember.

First, your children are not leaving you completely! They may not make it to the table for supper every night, ask you to do their laundry, or fix their car, but they will seek you out in different ways. Leaving the home is a transition that is valuable to your child's independence and success in the future. You may have heard of the phrase “empty nesting.” This is a popular way of stating that one's children have left the home (usually all of them). Recently, this phrase has begun to be replaced with “taking flight.”

While your child lived under your roof, you did your best in preparing him or her for the future. This included making sacrifices for the good of your child throughout his or her lifetime. This transition can be considered yet another sacrifice that serves the best interests of your child. Now, it is your child's time to explore the world, build lasting relationships, find his or her career path, and make some mistakes along the way. He or she is “taking flight.” Your child might resist this process, as it can be intimidating. Thus, your role is to gently push your child out of the nest. This process greatly impacts healthy identity development and independence.

Second, just as your child is becoming more independent, you are given the opportunity to take back some of your independence. This may be the reason some of you are viewing this transition positively. For years, you may have been devoting every extra waking moment to your child(ren). Now, you have an opportunity to devote more time to yourself and other areas of life. You might foster interests you have been putting off or consider strengthening relationships that have been given less attention, such as with your spouse or friends. Thus, along with your child, you continue to transition and grow.

Furthermore, this transition includes developing a new relationship with your child. For some of you, this may sound ideal. For others, this may sound scary. As your adolescent turns into an emerging adult, this relationship often becomes more mature. As you allow your child to develop as an independent individual when he or she leaves the home, your child will begin to build trust in him or herself. This trust is validating for your child and, ultimately, empowering.

He or she might still seek you out when mistakes are made or during decision-making. However, he or she is becoming an adult and has the potential to start relating to you in a more mature way. It is your role to help facilitate that mature relationship. If this seems frightening, do not worry. (over)



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It doesn't happen overnight. Your children will always be your children and you will always be their parent.

No matter what emotions you are feeling during this transition, remind yourself that these are okay. Do not rush this coping process. Remember, this is a time of growth for both you and your child. So it is important to take care of yourself and facilitate your own positive growth in ways that are right for you.

### Adjusting to the Empty Nest

#### **Find strength in your faith:**

- Pray.
- Talk with church members.
- Teach Sunday school.
- Get involved in church organizations.

#### **Engage in self-care:**

- Do what interests you!
- Get crafty.
- Read a book.
- Join a sport league.
- Go for walks.
- Join a gym.
- Schedule time to talk with your child.

#### **Strengthen your romantic relationship:**

- Go on a date with your spouse or significant other.
- Eat supper as a couple.
- Explore how your relationship and each other have changed since having children.

#### **Enhance friendships:**

- Lean on your friends for support.
- Implement weekly get-togethers.
- Attend their children's activities.

#### **Join other groups:**

- Volunteer for your favorite charity.
- Seek out support groups.