

A SINGLE PARENT'S GUIDE to Empty Nest Syndrome

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Parents often have strong and conflicting emotions when a child moves out of the house. If you're a single parent, the experience may be even more difficult because you don't have a partner around who is going through the same thing.

However, there's an upside too. **Recent studies suggest that empty nest syndrome can lead to positive changes in your life** once you get through the uncomfortable early stages.

Learn how to cope with your child's departure from home. Run down this list of activities for steps to take by yourself and with your family.

Steps to Take by Yourself:

- 1. Start early.** Even if you know your child will grow up someday, it can still take you by surprise. Prepare ahead of time by maintaining an identity that encompasses more than parenthood alone. Treat your kids as kids rather than substitutes for adult companions.
- 2. Accept your feelings.** You're bound to experience a wide variety of emotions. Give yourself permission to grieve. **Know that it's natural to feel happy and sad at the same time.**
- 3. Seek support.** You have plenty of company because 25% of American children grow up in single parent homes today. Connect with others who have similar family situations. Browse online or start a Meetup group in your neighborhood.

4. **Explore your interests.** This is your chance to have more time for yourself. Think about things you enjoy doing, like traveling or playing the piano.
5. **Set new goals.** Now that you've fulfilled most of your parenting responsibilities, **you can focus on other areas in your life.** Maybe you'll want to change careers, go back to school, or volunteer in your community.
6. **Expect relapses.** You'll probably feel less lonely as time goes by but have a strategy ready for when certain triggers bring your emotions back full force. Call a friend if you become depressed looking at your child's old bedroom.
7. **Rest and relax.** Any change in your lifestyle can create stress and disrupt your sleep cycle. Stick to a consistent bedtime. Find relaxation practices that work for you, such as a morning run or a warm bath at night.
8. **Consider counseling.** If you live alone, you may need to watch for any signs of serious depression or anxiety. Call a hotline if you find yourself crying excessively or using alcohol to try to change your mood.

Steps to Take with Your Child:

1. **Embrace change.** Your relationship with your child is different now, but it may become even more satisfying. Think positive and remain open to new possibilities. **Plan fun activities you can do together.**
2. **Listen closely.** Even though you're spending less time together, you can stay connected by paying attention to what your adult child needs. Let them know they can still count on you for guidance and support.
3. **Use technology.** On the practical side, there are a growing number of devices

and apps to help you communicate now that you're no longer living under the same roof. Collaborate to find a schedule and methods that work for both of you.

4. **Welcome significant others.** Both of you may wind up with new romantic partners. In general, unless there's any evidence of abuse, try to make potential new family members feel at home.

5. **Encourage independence.** Respect your child's privacy and let them solve their own dilemmas. **You can still stay close by expressing your affection and getting together face to face on a regular basis.**

Empty nest syndrome can be a challenging but rewarding transition. Congratulate yourself for raising a responsible adult and look forward to new achievements and a deeper relationship with your adult son or daughter.