



Embracing the empty nest: navigating life when your children leave home

Summary: Discover how to cope with empty nest syndrome as your children leave home by learning strategies for emotional resilience and finding new purpose.

With your children grown and gone, you're facing a kid-free home. How does it feel? For many, this period, commonly known as Empty Nest Syndrome, can evoke mixed emotions.

Empty Nest Syndrome is a common emotional experience for parents as their children leave home for college, work or other independent pursuits. Parents often feel a void in their daily lives, as their roles and routines dramatically shift. Evenings once filled with teenage activity now turn quiet, your social circles may shift and you might consider new job opportunities.

This change can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety and even depression as parents grapple with their evolving identity and purpose. This period often coincides with other significant life changes, such as retirement, career transitions or caring for aging parents, further intensifying feelings of uncertainty and stress. Fortunately, there are also positive aspects to this phase of life.

Redefining empty nest syndrome: turning a new chapter into an opportunity for growth

While initially challenging, the empty nest stage offers remarkable transformative potential for parents. This period presents a unique opportunity for self-discovery and personal growth. With the newfound time and freedom, parents can explore interests and passions that were set aside during the busy years of child-rearing. Reflecting on past accomplishments and setting new personal or professional goals can foster a sense of rejuvenation and excitement for the future.

[Gretchen Rubin](#), NYT bestselling author of [The Happiness Project](#), refers to this stage of life as the "open door stage," highlighting the freedom and possibilities it brings. Embracing this transition allows parents to explore new dimensions of their identities, rekindle passions, and build a fulfilling life rich with new experiences and growth.

Building emotional resilience: thriving through the next stage

This significant life transition can bring a mix of emotions, from pride and excitement for their child's new journey to sadness and a profound sense of loss. Addressing these emotional challenges with understanding and proactive strategies can help parents navigate the transition with greater resilience, finding new opportunities for happiness in this next phase of life.

Acknowledge and accept emotions

Begin coping with feelings of loss by acknowledging and accepting these emotions. It's important for parents to give themselves permission to grieve and to understand that feeling sad or disoriented is a normal part of the process. It's also normal if you've been looking forward to this period of time and aren't experiencing grief.

Prioritize self care

Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and sufficient sleep can significantly impact emotional well-being. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, yoga and journaling, can help parents stay grounded and present, reducing anxiety and stress. Professional counseling can also provide valuable strategies to navigate this life transition.

Rediscover personal interests

Finding new purpose often involves rediscovering personal passions and interests. Parents can explore hobbies they once enjoyed or try new activities. Activities like traveling, learning a new skill, or undertaking a home improvement project can offer a sense of accomplishment and forward momentum.

Strengthen relationships

The empty nest phase is an excellent opportunity to deepen existing relationships and forge new ones. Reaching out to friends and building new social connections can help parents feel less alone. Volunteering is another excellent way to find meaning and stay connected to the community.

Set new goals

Establishing new personal or professional goals, such as learning a new skill or starting a new project, can provide direction and motivation. These goals might include career aspirations, such as returning to the workforce, pursuing further education or starting a new business.

Ultimately, coping with an empty nest involves a delicate balance of grieving the past and embracing the future. By employing practical strategies to manage emotions and actively seeking new avenues for personal fulfillment, parents can transform this period into a time of renewal and opportunity.

A course that guides you through the empty nest phase

ASU is committed to the ideas of inclusion and impact, as outlined in our charter. We believe in the infinite potential to continue learning and growing, providing resources and capabilities to all community members, including the parents and families of our Sun Devils.

[Our new course, *Thriving in Your Empty Nest Chapter*](#), developed in conjunction with [MEA](#), shares ASU's vision that learning is ongoing. MEA, the world's first midlife wisdom school, empowers people to navigate difficult life transitions like empty nesting, finding inspiration and renewed energy to grow and thrive. Inspired by renowned psychologists like [Carol Dweck](#) and [Dan Gilbert](#), ASU and MEA champion a growth mindset that nurtures adaptability and joy in the face of change.

MEA's participants learn how to get unstuck, navigate a life change and cultivate a new sense of purpose. The curriculum is thought provoking, evidence based, and focuses on redefining midlife from a crisis to a chrysalis.

Kari Cardinale is a partner and Chief Content Officer at MEA, the world's first midlife wisdom school. She has nearly 30 years experience as a driven social entrepreneur in creative strategy, instructional design for live or virtual events, professional hosting, facilitating and training, and private consulting to bring out the best in thought leaders. She holds a Masters degree in psychology, masters work in organizational leadership, and is passionate in leading the new frontier of global community engagement. Kari previously served as a weekly contributor to the Huffington Post.

Darcy Richardson is Senior Director of Implementation at CareerCatalyst. Previously she served as Director of Continuing and Professional Education at EdPlus, a central enterprise unit for Arizona State University focused on the design and scalable delivery of digital teaching and learning models to increase student success and reduce barriers to achievement in higher education. Prior to taking on her current role, Richardson was Owner/President at Education Synergies. She holds an M.B.A. from Morehead State University and a B.B.A. in Marketing/Communications from Davenport University.