

EMPTY NEST

SUPPORT SERVICES

✿ ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿ *Leaping Into Change* ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿ ✿

“To change one’s life: Start immediately. Do it flamboyantly. No exceptions.”

~ William James

Doesn’t that quotation sound like cheerleaders at half time?

Well, some people leap into change to keep tears away. Some drop like lead in water. Others let themselves cry, rest, pause, meander, and unfold.

There is no right or wrong way to handle change. When children are packing up and leaving, the whole family feels the change, even the pets.

Amy called me and said that she was overeating, sleeping a lot, exercising less and making lists that could wallpaper a bedroom. She felt anxious and she was dreading having her daughter leave for college.

“I want to be upbeat and helpful for my daughter, but I can’t stop crying. I can’t stand the thought of coming back from her dorm and not having her at our dinner table for months.”

Separation is a transition. As parents, we are called upon to change our roles from manager to mentor as our children enter adulthood.

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During a telephone session this summer, one mom told me that she always loved creating imaginative birthday parties...she had treasure hunts with themes around her daughter’s interests. Between tears and laughter, she discovered that she wanted to be a consultant for parents about how to celebrate special occasions. She’s writing simple pamphlets with doodles on them and selling them online. She doesn’t want to be a party planner.

Richard and Olivia needed to get to know each other again, so, after we all chatted, they decided to take a four day weekend not too far from home. They considered Italy, but they weren’t ready to travel that far away so soon after their son had left.

David, a high school student with a college bound sibling, called me for suggestions about how to keep his parents out of his room. He felt they were trying to make up for lost time and now wanted him to be the center of their lives. No thanks.

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We grieve while we're driving, sitting in the den, shopping or watching movies. We miss the day to day connection with our children and mourn the end of innocence. We wonder if our children will be happy and whether we've prepared them well for the world. I'm sure you can add your own thoughts to this list when you imagine home without your children and their friends.

A question parents often ask is, "How often should I call them?"

Our children are trying to separate from us as well, so it's important to give them some space. When the urge to call comes, pause, count to five, breathe and try to resist instant messaging, texting or emailing. Let them initiate a conversation, if you can.

I admit that as soon as I opened my eyes in the morning, I used to dash to my computer to see if my daughter was online...she was three hours ahead of me. I carried my cell phone in my hand, not my purse and turned the volume to high. Attached to her? Yep. I just wanted to hear her voice. I didn't want to be bummed that I missed her call.

Talk with your children about a plan for staying in touch before they leave home, but be prepared to revise it once they have a sense of their daily routines. Some families set up a regular time to check in, but children are spontaneous, so it might be hard for them to stick to a schedule. If they call, they might only have a short time available to talk. It's hard to let a phone call end when you haven't been able to ask them all your questions and you've missed hearing their voices. Some children call because they're feeling alone and they actually miss you.

You might be surprised to realize that there are days you are relieved to have quiet, uninterrupted, carefree time for just you. You don't have to watch the clock. Your days are your own.

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Every family grieves differently, depending on how many changes they've experienced and how their relationship with their children has been. Who wouldn't be sad knowing they'll soon be saying goodbye to someone they love, even

though they'll be seeing them again?

No matter how old we are, we are always seeking role models to help us get through our life transitions. Sometimes, it might help to check in with ourselves and ask, "How am I doing right now and what do I need?"

May these transitions bring you courage and comfort.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1. Write a list of all the things you love about parenting.*
- 2. Write your child a note and include some inspiring quotations, jokes, photos, things you like about them, even four wishes, like...developing new relationships, discovering their passions, stepping outside their comfort zones or treating themselves with kindness. Mail it to them a week after they leave.*
- 3. Don't come back home to an empty house. Put fresh flowers in a vase. Invite a friend over for dinner. Rent a movie. Make comfort food and freeze it before you go. Buy a book and set it beside your bed. Begin a journal. Ask a friend to call you to get you out of the house a couple days after you come back home.*
- 4. If you need to keep busy: organize your house, play some music and start cleaning.*
- 5. Schedule a massage or manicure if that is a treat for you.*
- 6. Use a new scent for a body wash in the shower. Many cry in the shower so a sweet smell like lavender or mango can be comforting.*
- 7. Get some fresh air. Walk through the neighborhood, letting your eyes take in all that's new.*

• REMINDERS •

-  Individual and phone consultations
-  Invite me to speak in your community
-  Email me: natalie@emptynestsupport.com if you want to learn how to start a support group in your community or if there is already one in your neighborhood
-  Call or email if you are interested in attending a day or weekend empty nest gathering (natalie@emptynestsupport.com or 1-800-446-3310)
-  Forward this newsletter to a colleague or friend. We are building a community of support.
-  Send your good or bad stories of living in the empty nest to: natalie@emptynestsupport.com. Sending in your experience is a great way to connect with others