

Empty Nest

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by Sarah Parkin

Not that long ago, we begged for a little peace and quiet. Now that we have it, what do we do with it?

The kids are gone.

The house is extremely quiet.

Too quiet.

Most of us become overwhelmed with feelings. Cheers and tears occur at the same time. We are proud that we raised capable adults who are able to go out and live independently. We celebrate our success. However, after roughly two decades focused on parenting, we experience a letdown feeling when the children leave home. The house echoes with emptiness without them. Moms, in particular, may feel as though their purpose for existence has gone. We have to re-learn how to cook in smaller portions. There is no one to negotiate with over television programming, and we finally have to admit that we have no idea how to program the VCR. While the idea of a serene home might have seemed like nirvana a year ago, now it feels lonely. Even when we know that sending our children out to live on their own is the right thing to do, it still can hurt - a lot.

So, how do we deal with it?

Plan ahead

In most circumstances, we know in advance when our last or only child will move out. We should expect some mixed emotions and plan for it. Pick out some favorite books. Make a list of DVD's to enjoy. Sign up for a class. Schedule some time with friends. This may be especially important for friends in similar circumstances. We may find that they need us as much as we need them.

Get busy

No matter what size community you live in, there are things to do. Volunteer at a food bank or a care center. Have you always wanted to join a bowling league? A book group? Get symphony tickets? Now is the time. Track down old friends and catch up on the times. If you have the means, maybe you would like to do some traveling.

Keep in touch

In these days of advancing communication technology, even if your children moved to another country, you can talk to them regularly by cell phone. Send emails about what is happening in your neighborhood. Send the occasional care package of things you think they may need, from cookies to toilet paper.

Rekindle old feelings

If you are married, talk with your spouse about the things that attracted you to one another way back when you had time to spend together. Make a few dates. Take a walk or go listen to a concert together. Make time to talk with each other and rediscover one another.

Look on the bright side

Now you get to set the thermostat wherever you want. Now you can watch whatever television program suits your fancy. Now you can eat dinner whenever it is convenient for you. Appreciate that you can complete your thoughts without interruption. Learn to enjoy your solitude.

If you are crying all the time and don't want to go anywhere for an extended period of time, you may need to seek professional help. However, know that some crying and feeling blue is normal. If you need to indulge yourself in feeling sorry, go ahead. Then move forward. Know that by letting go, you have successfully completed your mission. Be proud of your success.

Then, crank up your own favorite music as loud as you want it and dance naked through the house if it will give you a thrill.

Sarah Parkin began her freelance writing career in 1999, primarily focusing on business and community issues. In 2001, she began writing biographies for Gale Group publications. She is a contributing writer for *View Magazine*. Red Coyote Press will publish her fiction short story, "Quick Draw", in the anthology *Medium of Murder* in March of 2008. She founded Sparkin Productions, LLC in 2007 to expand her freelance journalism business. www.sparkinproductions.com.