Tips for Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

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College 101 for Parents with College Bound Students
Hosted by UO Human Resources
Empty Nest Syndrome—What is it?

• Phenomenon that occurs when parents experience feelings of sadness and loss when their children leave for college

• Not a clinical diagnosis; however, the suffering is very real for some parents.
It’s OK to feel this way…

• Feelings of sadness and a sense of loss can be overwhelming when one or all of your children have left for college.

• Don’t compare your feelings with other parents….every parent experiences it differently so the habit of comparing won’t serve you.

• Your role and identity as a parent is changing and this can be bewildering for some parents.
It’s OK to feel this way...

• You may struggle with letting go and giving your college bound student space.

• You may experience anxiety and worry about your child’s safety away from home.

• Other children at home may also feel the effects of their sibling leaving for college.
Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

• You aren’t who you used to be and not yet who you will be, but a new you is on the way.

  ✔ You won’t instantly be able to change…..but gradually you’ll discover new ways to engage your time, energy and thoughts.
  ✔ Stay positive and look at this time from a position of hope and possibility.
Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

• This is a new chapter in your life that you may need to plan for.
  ✓ Reconnect with things in your life that are important to you; partner, younger children, your friends.
  ✓ Reconnect with yourself; your interests and new opportunities or challenges
Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

• Accept the timing of college – this is what you and they have worked towards.

• Resist the urge to check-in too much with your child but keep in touch.
  ✓ Let your child lead in the amount of communication; your expectations may not be theirs. Have a conversation about what they would like before they leave for school.
Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

- You are and were a good role model so believe in your children. Your concerns are normal. You can be concerned about your children while also trusting them.

- Know that your child still needs you and will throughout their life; when they do call for help, ask them how they want to handle a problem and how you can support them.
Coping with Empty Nest Syndrome

- Crying, even sobbing, happens and sometimes when you least expect it.
  - Be gentle and patient with yourself
  - Plan for support; make lunch plans with a friend
  - Use your Employee Assistance Program benefits and talk with a counselor if you need more than a friendly lunch.
Need More Support

• It’s a vulnerable time for parents when their child leaves for college. Parents may be susceptible to depression, alcoholism, identity crisis, and marital conflicts.

• Seek help from a counseling professional.
  • Contact the UO’s Employee Assistance Program
Employee Assistance Program

- Employees, their dependents, and eligible household members are eligible for service.
- Professional counselors can provide private and confidential services over the phone or in office. You can call 800-433-2320 (available 24/7) to speak to the counselor.
- If needed, they can refer you to a provider in your medical plan.
When to seek professional help…

- The distress you experience begins to impair your daily functions
- The distress does not lessen or go away after 6 months
- Extreme fluctuations in mood
- Heavy substance use
Let’s hear from our.....

PARENTS