

Generations

When the last baby bird flies away

As a new school/college year begins, two of my friends recently groused about the eeriness of a suddenly quiet house. When the last child takes the passed-down car with 200,000 miles and drives off to college alone, it's got to be an emotional time in any parent's life.

Mother and father birds have it easy when they leave the nest behind and fly off to begin another new adventure, but we humans can't simply pack up and move somewhere else.

I don't like the term "empty-nest syndrome," even though I know many couples experience something like it when the last child leaves for college, the military or moves into his/her own apartment. True to my Libra astrological sign of weighing pros and cons of every situation, I wanted to do a little research on both sides of the spectrum.

There were eons of sources on the internet to help support people at this stage of parenthood, so I came up with a condensed version of the best from the experts.

The No. 1 suggestion was that parents should "accept and embrace the timing" as a new freedom to do things that they may have put on the back burner

to raise their kids. Lean on loved ones and other close contacts for support and share your feelings. Think about the extra time and energy you might have to devote to your marriage or personal interests after your last child leaves home.



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Plan a weekend away on the spur of the moment or get back to "date night" with your spouse or significant other. It may take a bit of coaxing, threatening, tears or, eventually, an ultimatum, but build up the outing with something fun for both of you. Tickets to a football game look mighty attractive if strategically placed next to a brochure advertising an art exhibit.

For single gals, reconnect with friends for a night out at the movies or dinner at a fancy eatery. Take an art class even if you can't draw a stick figure or cooking lessons that don't include anything in a microwave.

For single guys, enjoy more basketball, football and baseball games with pals or sign up at a local gym to get in better shape (notice that I'm leaving the ladies out of the gym suggestion — sure,

it's healthy for us women, too, but not as much fun as a glass of Chardonnay with the gals).

While those in the know suggest that parents make an effort to maintain contact through visits, phone calls, emails, texts or video chats with the kids, it should always be prefaced with the words "no surprise" when it comes to visits, and definitely no "daily/hourly/every 10 minutes" for all other ways to communicate.

Also avoid comparing your child's experience or expectations to your own. That's tough for baby boomers, who find it difficult to erase bell bottoms, peace signs and Woodstock gatherings from their memories, or for the next generation, who traded in tie dyed shirts and love beads for leisure suits and platforms.

But this is the now generation, so parents need to refrain from ever saying the word "groovy" or cringing when they see a picture of their brilliant child on Facebook sporting a new tattoo on his/her body part that wasn't there when he/she left for college.

It's all part of us growing up as they grow up and very natural to feel blue in the beginning. After a few weeks, however, it will pass, so take a look at the list below and see if you can relate to one or all

of them.

Your upstairs no longer smells like feet.

Ketchup lasts longer.

Your washing machine no longer produces Slim Jim wrappers, gum, coins, pens.

Instead of five loads of laundry a week, you're down to one.

No wet towels growing penicillin.

The phone isn't ringing off the hook at all hours of the night.

You switch from a gallon of milk to a half gallon and it lasts.

Your bathroom has a steady supply of toilet paper and not an empty roll.

No dirty socks stuck in the sofa.

No tripping over sneakers in the foyer.

No more navigating cars in the driveway so you can get out first.

No more running out at midnight for a supply of tampons.

No loud music that shakes the walls and tilts Grandma's picture.

No more rap music on your favorite radio station.

And think about this quote from one of our favorite beloved comedians:

"You see much more of your children after they leave home."

—Lucille Ball

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