Can Empty Nest Syndrome Lead to Depression?

by ERIC PATTERSON

Coping With Empty Nest Depression

The days are growing shorter and the weather is turning cooler. Summer is over and has been replaced by fall. The kids are back to school and whether your kindergartener is boarding a big, yellow bus for the first time or your young adult is heading off to college, feelings of depression can start to creep in.

Empty nest syndrome is comprised of feelings of sadness, loss and despair when your children leave the home. Symptoms of depression springing forth at this time are common. For years, your life has revolved around your children, and life without them will need some adjusting. Although these symptoms may be intense for some people, empty nest syndrome is not a diagnosable mental health disorder. But that doesn't mean that you should resign yourself to feeling the way you do.

If your nest is feeling a bit empty, look to these tips to mend it; solidify the foundation, spruce the place up, and stave off empty nest depression.

Acknowledge The Loss

Grief is a large part of empty nest – not all grief follows a death. Your child going to school signifies a great deal, including the passing of time and increased independence of your children; they don't need you as much anymore. Even if you are excited or happy about your child's future, you can still find yourself feeling loss. Admitting and acknowledging the loss will make sense of your feelings and provide context in which to view them.

Find New Structure

Your day looks drastically different when your kids leave for school, whether it's grade school or university. Your responsibilities and commitments change in extreme ways. Even though having more free time may sound like a much-needed break when times are busy, having too much when school starts will give you plenty of opportunity to dwell on missing your child. This can breed feelings of loss and emptiness. Finding new ways to structure and organize your day will help keep your mind on other things. Perhaps laundry was previously a frantic process crammed into one day. Now you have more time to spread out the routine and create a schedule around it.

Balance Communication

Feeling disconnected and 'out of touch' with your child is common with empty nest syndrome. Many parents make the mistake of coming on too strong and pressuring their child for information about school, friends or life in general, which can lead to the child pulling away. If your son or daughter seems to resist your questioning, trying backing off slightly and allowing them to come to you with the information. They are adjusting to their new independence just as you are. They will need some time to figure out what level of communication works best.

Add Positives

Your relationship with your child has changed. Rather than committing too much energy towards recapturing what your relationship once was, spend time finding and adding new positives to your life. Take a class, recommit to physical fitness, or spend more time visiting and communicating with friends. These activities will reduce sadness and depression during this difficult time.

Conclusion

Empty nest syndrome may not be a diagnosable disorder but it is something that affects many parents each year. Adjusting to the change in relationship with your child takes time and patience. The good news is it also gives you a fantastic opportunity to try new things and have new experiences. By working to address your empty nest feelings, you can ensure that your relationship with your child remains strong for years to come.