

# PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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## Empty Nest: From a Single Parent's Perspective

■ by Deborah Mitchell, MS, LMFT, and single parent



As a therapist, you might think I'd be prepared for the feelings surrounding my only child leaving for college. Before she left, when people asked how I was feeling about it, I'd tell them the truth (a good idea for a Christian, right?)-- her leaving was probably the best thing that could happen to our relationship at that time. I was proud of her and looking forward to her continuing to grow as an adult (partly so she could grow in appreciation of her wonderful mother). I wasn't too worried about "empty nest syndrome" as I had fulfilling work requiring many hours, enjoyable hobbies, loving friends/family, and lots of cleaning to catch up on if I ever had enough time to get bored!

The painful truth is that empty nest is synonymous with grief. Grief isn't just about death and loss, it's about change. Even when the change is something wonderful, something is getting left behind.

When dealing with an adult child leaving the home, it can feel like we are the ones getting left behind.

### Symptoms of empty nest can be:

- ◆ Mild to severe depression.
- ◆ Significant levels of isolation.
- ◆ Identity crisis and/or perception of a lack of purpose.
- ◆ Increased conflict with your support system.
- ◆ Greater vulnerability to alcoholism.

### As a single parent, here are some possible additional challenges:

- ◆ Losing a greater percentage of your "reason for living." Fight that desire to call and "help" your adult; your desire to parent should not outweigh his/her desire to be independent.
- ◆ Increased ability to isolate and strengthen depression. Isolation and depression tend to be a strong spiral downward that is difficult to stop.
- ◆ Increased belief that no one knows exactly how you feel. Humanly speaking, this is unfortunately true. However, there is One who knows how you feel and cares more than anyone else ever possibly could.

It's important to remind yourself whenever this thought occurs.

- ◆ Fewer support resources for 24/7. It seems like the depressed feelings happen most when those who might care would be sleeping. The married can whisper, "Are you awake?" and have someone there. Single parents with an empty nest? Not so much.

### Some functional ways to cope:

- ◆ Begin/refocus on self-care, such as exercise and eating healthy.
- ◆ Spend some of your "extra time" in prayer and Bible study.
- ◆ Join a Bible study group.

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# Child-Centered Divorce

## 7 Ways to Protect Your Children



■ by Melinda Hammond, PsyD, Clinical Psychologist

In God's perfect plan, marriage is forever. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world and sometimes divorce is inevitable. When children are involved, divorce becomes more complicated. But there's hope. Studies have shown that how parents relate after a divorce can act as a protective factor for children, and is often more powerful than the pre-divorce relationship. Children whose parents maintain a cooperative relationship after divorce are protected from many harmful effects.

So if divorce is inevitable (or has already happened), how can you protect your children?

**1. Focus on your own behavior.** When we're in conflict, our first instinct is to focus on the other person: what they've done wrong, what they should change, how they've hurt us. But you cannot change or control that person's behavior. You can control your own. So when life feels out of control, and your instinct tells you it's the other person's fault, take a deep breath, a walk, and focus on what you can control. You can control the rules in your own home, the environment you create for your child,

and the type of relationship you cultivate.

As you read this list, you may have the urge to point out where your ex-spouse has fallen short. Don't. Focus on your own behavior, since you cannot change anyone else's.

**2. Communicate.** Find a low-conflict way to communicate with your co-parent. This may be a shared calendar, e-mail, text, phone calls, or even a website set up specifically to facilitate communication.

**3. Avoid talking about the other parent.** Your child is a sponge; he or she soaks up what you say. Your child is made of 50% you, 50% the other parent. So if you speak ill of your ex-spouse, your child may feel like part of them is "bad." Kids are smart. If your ex is truly a bad person, your children will figure it out on their own. If what you have to say isn't necessary ("time to go to your moms!") or unequivocally positive ("your dad was really good at badminton, so I bet you'll be good, too!"), leave it unsaid.

**4. Keep "grown up land" for the grown-ups.** Kids don't need to know about child

support payments or who is supplying their needs. Furthermore, children need to feel like the people in charge are confident in their choices. With few exceptions, visitation, living arrangements and other adult topics should be left to the adults. Don't be afraid of letting kids give input, but the ultimate decision should lie with the adults. Finally, your child cannot be your go-between. Kids should never be left to send messages, correspondence or anything else between their parents.

**5. Don't fight in front of the children.** This one seems obvious, but is much harder in practice. If drop-offs and pick-ups are full of tension, kids will have a more difficult time adjusting. Practice firm boundaries such as "we're not talking about this now." If an argument does break out, avoid calling your ex-spouse names or threatening him/her.

**6. Stop worrying about who is right.** No one wins a divorce. Unless you want to be stuck in that pattern forever, you'll have to learn to let go of the ways you were wronged, and the ways you might be wronged in the future. If not for your own sake, for the sake of your children.

**7. Take care of yourself.** Your children need you. Not only that, but they need the best you. If you're not taking care of yourself, no one else will. Make sure you're eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising. Find some new hobbies that feed your soul. As parents, it's often easy to forget about our own needs, but if our needs aren't being met, it's difficult to meet the needs of our children.

Divorce is difficult for everyone involved, and unfortunately its impact is often biggest on children. By providing them a safe, stable environment and caring for yourself, you can minimize their suffering. ■

*Dr. Hammond is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and sees clients in our New Lenox and Orland Park locations.*

## New Staff



### Josephine Martinez, MSW, LCSW Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Chicago (South Loop), IL location

Josephine has more than 20 years of experience working with children, adolescents, and adults. She enjoys working with clients to provide a safe environment with them to have their voice heard, to face challenges and to discover strengths in their journey through life. Josephine applies an integrative therapy approach to assist clients to effectively work towards holistic healing — emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Josephine earned her Master in Social Work from Michigan State University and her Clinical Psychology BA from University of Michigan.



# I Can Stop Anytime, On My Own

■ by Doretha McBride, MA, LCSW, CADC



## April is National Alcohol Awareness Month

**H**ow many times have you heard someone respond, when being confronted with their problematic alcohol use, "I can stop anytime, on my own"? How many times have you heard they were successful in their attempt, if it was ever attempted at all?

This mindset is a common dilemma facing families of alcoholics. It may be due to an attitude of ambivalence towards drinking. It may be associated with perceived stigma of treatment and requesting assistance. And because alcohol is a legal drug, society tends to minimize its dangers - until it hits home and becomes unmanageable. Although a person knows there is a problem, they enjoy drinking. This creates an inability to decide to stop without assistance.

**Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism On the Rise.** Alcoholism is not concerned with one's status, education, age, or upbringing. Alcohol abuse and alcoholism must be taken seriously! Just take a look at these alcohol-related statistics, which alarmingly continue to rise!  
(Statistics from <https://talbotcampus.com/index.php/resources/disease-info/2015-alcoholism-statistics/>)

- Alcohol poisoning kills six people daily (CDC).
- Three in four alcohol poisoning deaths involve adults ages 35 to 64, and most were men. (CDC)
- The majority of alcohol deaths are among non-Hispanic whites. (CDC)
- Of the 3.9 million Americans who received treatment for a substance abuse problem in 2005, 2.5 million were treated for alcohol use. (Drug Free World)
- In 2013, 24.6 percent of people ages 18 or older reported they engaged in binge drinking in the past month. (NIAAA)
- Alcohol abuse is the third highest cause of death in the in the U.S. (NIAAA)
- Teen alcohol use kills 4,700 people each year –more than all illegal drugs combined. (MADD)
- Drunk driving costs the United States \$199 billion annually. (MADD)
- Kids who start drinking young are seven times more likely to be in an alcohol-related motor vehicle accident. (MADD)
- 100,000 people die each year from alcohol-related causes: drinking and driving crashes, other accidents, falls, fires, alcohol-related homicides and suicides. (NCAAD)

**Alcoholism is Progressive and Affects Every Area of Life.** Alcoholism is a problem that, without help, gets continuously and progressively worse. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies it as a progressive disease.

Alcoholism causes a myriad of problems which affect every area of the alcoholic's life. They have lost the trust of others and they don't really trust themselves. Alcoholics engage in distorted thinking, defending or justifying their behavior while blaming others for resulting problems. Denial is a key factor relative to this addictive behavior; the alcoholic refuses to admit they have a problem and makes excuses for the unseemly behaviors. They're the last to know the problem exists and will resist help, even if it means losing their loved ones and all possessions. After all, they are familiar with this lifestyle and have an underlying fear: "What will happen if I stop?!"

**Mental, Physical, & Spiritual Aspects.** There is no question that heavy, long-term drinking is harmful and destructive to the whole person. It has significant implications for one's mental, physical, and spiritual health. The combination of these three characteristics creates alcoholism.

**Obsession** - the mental force that drives alcoholism. This impetus communicates to the brain 'I not only want the alcohol, but I really need it'. This nagging thought won't allow the alcoholic to focus on normal daily activities. It is always in the back of the mind driving its way forward, wanting to take total control.

**Compulsion** - the physical aspect of alcoholism. This unconscious mechanism and uncontrollable impulse causes repeated drinking in an attempt to avoid unacceptable thoughts and desires that create anxiety. It is what is seen - the getting up at all hours to have it, the 'going to any lengths' to get it, the internal force that leads the alcoholic to act against their will as a result of the obsession.

**Self-Centeredness** - the spiritual aspect of alcoholism. This aspect has eased God out of the equation. The alcoholic is motivated by obsession and compulsion to get what is believed to be needed/deserved to provide a perceived sense of balance and calm, at any cost! No matter who it hurts, what is lost, or who pays!

**Getting Help is Critical.** It is my prayer that, with this information, you will be armed for the fight against alcoholism. Alcohol withdrawal can be deadly so, once identified, it is important to get help. The alcoholic will likely need an assessment by a trained therapist to determine the level of care that's needed. A health assessment and a motivational interview will provide valuable information needed by the trained therapist to make the proper decision. Prior to therapy, hospitalization in a detox facility may be the best option. But always...always seek assistance. Because, if they could 'stop anytime, on their own', they would. ■

**Initially, seeking assistance may cause feelings of hopelessness, shame, and fear of failure.**

**But Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." (Matthew 19:26 NLT)**

*Doretha McBride is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. She enjoys working with clients in our Schererville, IN and South Holland, IL office locations.*





**Toll Free: 800.361.6880**

Email: [info@chicagochristiancounseling.org](mailto:info@chicagochristiancounseling.org)

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## Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

*continued from p 1 - Empty Nest:*

- ◆ Join a group that does a hobby you enjoy (e.g.: a book club, a cooking class, an outdoor adventure group).
- ◆ See a good counselor, particularly if depressive symptoms are interfering with functioning in everyday life.

**Some things to NOT do:**

- ◆ I repeat, do not keep calling your adult and "guilt" them into checking in or listening to your feelings about empty nest. This is likely to drive a wedge into your relationship-- you still feel lonely and his/her maturing process may be complicated.
- ◆ Do not start acting out with the

opposite sex out of loneliness. You are likely to regret it deeply at some point.... Be careful if beginning to date at this time.

- ◆ Whatever you do, DON'T LOSE HOPE ! While this time is a very trying one, it can also become a time of great blessing as we discover/rediscover support resources, untapped strengths and gifts, and a deeper relationship with God. It is not surprising that God has already provided many of our answers through His Word and the body of Christ. When an adult child has not left home in a positive way and worry is what you are experiencing, peace can still be found (see Philippians 4:6-8).

By the way, my adult daughter is currently doing her student teaching. Since the school prohibits additional working, she moved back home for a semester! She became engaged over Christmas and will be moving out when she graduates to live near her fiancé (I have a hard time getting used to saying that word). I'm REALLY happy for her! I don't expect to have ANY problems at all with empty nest THIS time (just kidding)! ■



*Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Schererville, IN location.*