

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.

Continue to Page 2 - Functional Ways to Cope and Things NOT to do

Article taken from the Mar | Apr 2016 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
Chicago Christian Counseling Center has locations throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana

www.chicagochristiancounseling.org

800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling | Text CCCC to 22828 to join our email list

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

Empty Nest: From a Single Parent's Perspective

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

Page 2 - Functional Ways to Cope and Things NOT to do

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.
- ◆ Join a group that does a hobby you enjoy (e.g.: a book club, cooking class, 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.

Article taken from the Mar | Apr 2016 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
Chicago Christian Counseling Center has locations throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana

www.chicagochristiancounseling.org

800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling | Text CCCC to 22828 to join our email list

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