



AN EMPTY NEST

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The revision has been done, the end-of-school prom attended and the A-level results are out. Your beloved son or daughter is off to university. Once the celebrations have ceased and you have tried to ensure that your child can operate a washing machine, cook a meal and manage their money to some extent, you are ready to deliver them and their stuff to university.

For many of us this may be the first time our children have been away from home for any period of time. You may be surprised by feelings of sadness and loss. As a dedicated parent you may also wonder what your purpose is now. For some this may be a major life change. These feelings are completely normal – after all, it is the end of an era and the start of a new one. You may worry about how your child will cope and you may find that the family dynamic has changed. Gradually, however, things will settle down. Family members will readjust and you will discover that your child can function without you.

You can also help yourself and your family navigate this journey by considering the following:

- Feelings of sadness and loss are normal. Acknowledge and accept your feelings.
- Talk to family and friends about how you are feeling. If

this doesn't help and you continue to feel swamped by your emotions, consider talking to a counsellor.

- Keep in touch with your child by whatever means works for you both – text, Skype, social media...
- Remind yourself that the goal of parenthood is to raise a confident child who can function independently – congratulate yourself on a job well done!
- Give your child 'permission' to leave home. Be positive and encourage and support them to be independent.
- If your child starts to really struggle at any time, suggest they contact the university's student support services. Universities provide – among other things – financial, academic and wellbeing support.
- Be mindful about siblings – how are they coping with the departure of their brother or sister?
- Rediscover and reinvest in your relationship. Enjoy some couple time. If your child's departure has unfortunately led to tensions in the relationship that can't be resolved, think about some couple counselling.
- Factor in some 'me time'. Now that your taxi duties are over – or at least reduced – look upon this as an opportunity to develop new interests; salsa, yoga, swimming or whatever works for you. ●

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