

How to Let Go of Growing Kids



Making a healthy transition from adolescence to adulthood is essential for your kids — and for you.

As you let go of maturing children, you must forge a new, adult relationship with them as a friend and adviser. The keys to this transition are communication and flexibility, says therapist Ken Silvestri, Ph.D., former president of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy's New Jersey Division.

It's part of a process that accelerates as children move through adolescence. "Teens want to be independent, but deep down they also want to be connected," says Dr. Silvestri. You should balance increasing freedom with some guidelines — maintaining a curfew, for example.

"Young adults in college are still an extension of that adolescence," he adds, and they are subject to your values while part of your household. "Even when adult children are graduating from college, there's a connection," says Dr. Silvestri. "You just make it appropriate to the situation."

Children mature at different speeds, he warns, so there's no set of age guidelines for independence. "Parents are going to feel a certain amount of sadness," he adds, as their roles change. "The more you talk about it, the easier the transition will be."

Making the Transition

Here are a few suggestions on successfully managing a healthy separation:

- Talk openly and honestly about your feelings. Don't let them fester: Broach the subject with kids as soon as sadness surfaces. Encourage your kids to do the same.
- Help your children plan their independent future. If you do it together, the emotional stress of separation will be easier to manage. Consider volunteering to help decorate that first apartment, for example.

- Become a friend and collaborator to your adult children, but don't impose your own values. As your daughter is praising that fancy new condo she's about to lease, you might caution: "I hear what you're saying, but in my experience, it may be too much to pay that kind of rent."
- Adapt to your empty nest by forging new relationships with your spouse or other loved ones — perhaps by planning more activities together. "The adult child is affected by seeing how well the parents handle the transition," says Dr. Silvestri.
- Talk to other parents who already have been through the separation process. In most cases, knowing more about what lies ahead will greatly reduce the anxiety.
- Accept that, as a loving parent, you're probably going to feel some grief during the separation process. Don't fight it. Recognize that as children grow up and move out, the emotional impact is usually bittersweet.



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