



New York State Employee Assistance Program

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The Empty Nest: Alas, or At Last?

Parents spend a great deal of time and energy teaching their children to make decisions, plan for the future, and become independent. Then, one day these children decide that they have learned enough to venture out on their own. Once your last child has flown the coop, you may discover that you live in an “empty nest”.

For some parents, this comes with a feeling of great satisfaction and a sigh of relief, signaling a well-deserved break from the laundry room and grocery shopping. The empty nest also brings an opportunity to travel, cultivate new friendships, take up a hobby, and plan date nights.

For other parents, it signals the beginning of a quiet existence that can be unsettling. Separation from a child can bring about a feeling of loss, uselessness, isolation, and even depression.

The feelings associated with empty nest can become complicated if they coincide with other major life changes such as menopause or retirement. All major life changes require some adjustment. It takes time to establish and get comfortable with a new routine, but you can ease the transition to an empty nest by planning ahead and taking action.

Remain upbeat. Take pride in the fact that you prepared your child to live apart from you. Focus on things *you* always wanted to do, but maybe didn't have the time, money, or energy to do. Pay attention to your health, and start doing some form of exercise that you find enjoyable.

Avoid comparisons. Try not to compare this child's plans to those of older siblings or your own experience. There is no template for how to leave home. Concentrate on what *this* child needs to be successful.

Maintain contact. It has never been easier to keep in touch with loved ones than it is these days. Commit to scheduling regular visits, phone calls, text messages, and video-chats, but resist the urge to make an unannounced visit to your child. Stay connected to the friends you made during your child's activities.

Think carefree. Weekends can be less structured and more spontaneous. If you miss the hustle and bustle of your child's sports routine or other activities, follow a minor league or local team. Attend a high school play or concert. Many parents find it liberating to attend these functions without the anxiety that accompanies watching your own child perform! Dinnertime can be more casual and less work.

Obtain help. Seek the advice and companionship of family and friends who are enjoying their own empty nests. Join some of their leisure activities. Talk with them about how you feel. If your sadness persists, [contact your EAP coordinator](#).

For more information and resources, get connected with your EAP Coordinator at

800-822-0244