

Family Transitions Coaching

Creating Balance, Resilience, & Fulfillment

Empty Nest ~ an end or a beginning?

By Ellen Neiley Ritter, Ph.D.

It's January. Your child's applications have finally been completed – you've survived the first part of the stressful college search. But for some reason, instead of feeling a sense of relief, you wake up with a sense of dread lurking somewhere in the back of your mind that you know has little to do with the four years of college bills you're about to face.

You probably thought it wouldn't hit until you drove away from the campus, leaving your son or daughter to fend for themselves for the first time, or when you got home and notice how quiet the house seems with one less person. But even now, months before, you're not sure you're ready, are plagued with questions about how you will fill the empty days or what it will mean for you.

Welcome to the beginning stages of the Empty Nest transition! Whether your child is soon heading off to college, getting married or moving to a new city, it's normal to feel some concern about what this means for your life. For the past 18 or more years, a large part of your identity, and on some days, probably all of your energy, have been devoted to meeting the needs of your children and that's about to change.

Empty nest transitions are one of the larger changes families go through, and like most transitions, they develop gradually, stirring up what has been a fairly stable routine, as well as questions you may not have had to think about for years.

Do you now cringe almost as much as your child to the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Lots of empty nesters do.



The good news is that this period can be one of incredible growth and personal fulfillment, a time to really focus on yourself, your needs, and your dreams.

How? As with all transitions, once you've accepted that change is coming, taking some time to come to terms with what it means to you is important. While many of us aren't used to thinking about how we'd like to design our own lives, this period of transitions is one when you can do just that. And you deserve to – you've just completed one of the most worthwhile and difficult jobs there is – raising a child who is almost an adult, ready to go off into the world.

In quiet moments, brainstorm about what you'd like to do with the extra time and energy that this transition will bring. What makes you feel happy? What are your strengths? What do you now know and what have you wanted to learn? Have you always wanted to go back to school, start your own business, develop your artistic abilities, travel, or play golf? Think big!

Once you've allowed yourself to play with all



Many find that the empty nest transition gives them a chance to reconnect with their dreams as well as their partner.

What is Coaching?

According to the International Coaching Federation, "coaching is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives . . . clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life". Clients say that coaching increases self-awareness and self-confidence, lowers their feelings of stress, and improves their overall quality of life.

Coaching provides a safe, supportive relationship to explore and pursue your dreams, helping you to determine how you can live a life which is more fulfilling, balanced, and satisfying. We've found that coaching increases clarity -- about your previous choices, your dreams and goals, as well as a greater clarity about the steps you can take to create a life that better reflects your values, strengths and dreams.

And for many clients, coaching provides them with an opportunity to put aside the "Gremlin" that could be holding them back -- that small voice within us that makes us question our abilities, our relationships, our dreams, and our ability to achieve them.

Meeting face-to-face or over the phone with your coach, you work together as a team to explore the possibilities that exist in your life, building on the strengths which you already have, building others which you may need to achieve your goals.

International Coaching Federation,
<http://www.coachfederation.org/eweb/>

of the different possibilities, look into how you can make it a reality. Talk with your friends, your partner, or experts. The internet is another great resource to find some great information on the possible steps you need to make your dreams a reality.

Taking the time to begin thinking about designing your own life now may not keep away the tears or the feelings of emptiness as you drive away from the college on that first day, but will provide you with something to focus on, to feel excited about.

And if it all feels overwhelming, if thinking about doing things for yourself is foreign to you, or if you'd like support during this part of your journey, consider working with a coach to help you identify your strengths and dreams, and help you develop a plan that will let this time of transition become one where you flourish.

The mother of a college junior and her own senior heading off to college, Ellen Neiley Ritter, Ph.D. is aware of the questions and potentials associated with the empty nest transition. Completing her Ph.D. in family psychology and getting internationally certified as a coach in "midlife", she founded Family Transitions Coaching, a positive, strength-based coaching program, working with women and families during times of transition to help them develop balance, resilience, and fulfillment.

*Do not follow where the path
may lead.
Go, instead, where there is no
path and leave a trail.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you're interested in finding out whether coaching will help you during your times of transition, or to sign up for future newsletters, visit our website at

www.familytransitionscoaching.com

to sign up for a complimentary 20-minute coaching session with one of our professional coaches.