

Family Transitions Coaching

Creating Balance, Resilience, & Fulfillment

Graduation is Over: Now What?

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High school graduation. It's a time of great excitement, a time to celebrate all of the accomplishments of your child. Even though this moment is something you've worked towards for the past 18 years, it's often a time that is also filled with a lot of sadness and fear about what comes next, when they head off to college or to begin their new lives.

Transitions like Empty Nest often are times where we look back on where we have been and begin questioning where we are going now that our lives are about to change. The problem is that we often do not know how to go about creating a life which is more fulfilling. And yet, here we are, almost in a state of limbo between graduation and their leaving and heading off, leaving us with an empty nest.

Instead of spending these months worrying about the coming changes, letting our fears of the unknown rule, we can use this time to begin preparing for the change. Transitions provide us with the chance to take time to connect with our inner selves and create a purposeful, fulfilling life. One of the first steps in this journey is to clarify what you need in your life and what you value.

Needs

As Maslow pointed out, we all have needs, beginning with survival and security needs (food, shelter, etc.), up through the need to live a self-actualized, purposeful life. As a parent, we often spend so much time thinking about meeting others' needs that we rarely take the time to think about our own needs. But until a need is met, it will drive you, using most of your energy to satisfy it, zapping your energy to pursue those things that will give your life purpose and meaning.

Take some time to think about possible needs you may have – the need to feel loved or cared for, the need for recognition or power, the need to achieve or make a difference in the world. Are

these needs now being met? If not, if there are gaps, this might be a great time to begin finding out how you can get these needs met. If one of the fears you hold about this transition is that you will feel alone, this may be a great time to begin reaching out to others, through support groups like EmptyNestMoms.com, or perhaps making more of an effort to get together with old friends who have mattered to us, or even making more of an effort to connect with your spouse or partner. Another option is to look around and see if there are clubs or organizations in your area which interest you. The important thing to realize is that you have the power to realize and address unmet needs so that they do not control your life.

Values

Once you have identified the unmet needs, another important step you can take now is to really begin to think about what you value in life. Think about those back to times when you felt a great sense of fulfillment or accomplishment. Perhaps it's helping others or focusing on your spiritual nature, or creative side. Those who live a life which is based on those things that they value have a far greater sense of purpose, fulfillment and happiness, so you can use this time to begin really thinking about what you value and how you can increase those opportunities in your life. If you value your artistic style, start exploring whether there are classes available in your area for next Fall, or buy a set of paints and set aside some time each week to paint. If it's working with children, perhaps look into whether you want to go back to school to get a degree in teaching, or look for jobs teaching nursery school, or volunteer opportunities that will allow you to do something you value and enjoy.

As difficult as this time may be, it's also a great chance to begin to prepare and consider what type of life you'd like to have after your child heads off. Taking the time now to identify your needs and values can be a first real step in creating a life which brings you joy and purpose after your child goes off to school.