



TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD *Preparing Your Children to Leave the Nest*

You've probably heard that old saying: "when wings are grown, birds and children fly away." As any parent knows, however, that journey away from home begins the minute you send your children off to kindergarten. It's a slow accumulation of little comings and goings, three steps forward, two steps back and no matter what kind of care you take, there are always missteps and dead ends along the way, for both you and your child.

It's a delicate balance for parents- the dance of holding on and letting go- and it helps to prepare yourself for what may seem like the ultimate leave taking when kids go off to college or move out to start lives of their own.

Did you notice the words 'seem like' in the previous sentence? The other thing most parents understand is that parenting never ends. Whether your children live around the block, across the country, or in your basement, they remain, for good or bad, your children. As they leave childhood behind, their needs for parenting simply shift from your day-to-day involvement to more standing on the sidelines, but their need for support, love and validation remains the same.

Because parenting styles have come under closer scrutiny in recent years, you may find yourself wondering if your parenting was- and still is- effective. Do you meet those criteria for snowplow or Blackhawk helicopter parent? Perhaps you are a tiger or a drone? The implication, of course, is that the last generations of children have been overparented, to their lasting detriment. Take heart however, in a recent New York Times survey that showed less than 20% of parents admitting over-intervening in the lives of their children. Most parents got it just right.

So what do you need to get right about the transition of your children to adulthood? Here are a few tips.

- Remember the process began many years ago; a lot of their learning has taken place by osmosis, by watching what you and the other adults around them said and did.
- Missteps and mistakes have been, and will continue to be, part of the process, for both of you. Sometimes the most memorable advice comes in the form of an apology. Work to incorporate "I'm sorry" into your vocabulary when you realize you haven't been helpful, or even perhaps hurtful. You teach your child humility, forgiveness and humanity when you can acknowledge your errors in judgment. And don't kid yourself- we all make them!
- Remind yourself that the goal of effective parenting is not to take away your children's stress, but to help them learn how to cope with it in healthy ways. Look at your own stress management strategies. If you see some things you would be upset to see your children imitate, consider changing what you're modeling.
- Recognize that the world has changed since you were a young adult and don't use your personal standards as guidelines for what your child should or should not do. Try to keep on top of generational trends and acknowledge some of them may be impossible for you to understand.

The bottom line, perhaps, is that the growth opportunities in parenting don't stop when our kids leave home, they just change and expand to embrace the larger world our children are exploring. They still need you- just in a different way. So don't lock the door or change your phone number. Keep the lines of communication open and leave room in your heart for the amazing journeys young adulthood will expose you to if you're willing to stand on those sidelines and watch with support, admiration and love.