

Embrace New Journeys as an Empty- Nester

It is amazing to me how time flies. It seems only yesterday that I dropped my twin boys off at preschool. This month they graduate from high school. For them, moving on in life is both exciting and scary. Exciting because they have completed one journey and scary because it is the beginning of another.

As parents, we feel some of the same feelings. When our child goes to college or moves out, we are faced with, "What now?" "Who am I?" "Where do I go from here?" Empty-nest syndrome is the constellation of feelings that parents often have when their last child leaves home. We have spent nearly two decades preparing our child for success. During that time, we have defined ourselves as parents. So, it is only natural to feel a loss when they no longer need us in the way they once did.

Empty-nesters might experience the following symptoms: sadness, fear, major daily adjustments, how we view ourselves, and how our marriage functions. In the past, women were most affected by this syndrome because they were the ones that stayed home to care for the children. But, today, men are often the primary caretakers, so they too can suffer from empty-nest syndrome. OK. Now it is time to plan the rest of our life. Here are some tips to do just that.

1. Spouses reconnect. If unmarried, take this time to meet new people.
2. Make time for friends.
3. Make a "dream list," including places to visit, things to accomplish.
4. Find a hobby.
5. Find a life purpose, such as volunteering for a church or charity.
6. Take a class or start a new career.
7. Talk with other empty-nesters.
8. Seek a counselor or a life coach.

Don't be alarmed if these empty feelings last a year or two. During this time, do not make any major decisions. The choices people make under duress are typically unwise ones. If we are patient and follow the above steps, then we are sure to find exciting ways to redefine ourselves.

Dr. Kristina Welker is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a Doctorate in Psychology. She is in private practice and a member of the Ahwatukee Behavioral Health Network. Reach her at (480) 893-6767 or drkristinawelker @cox.net.