

## Empty Nest Syndrome: Tips for Coping

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*By Mayo Clinic staff*

Worried about empty nest syndrome? Find out how an empty nest can affect parents, what you can do to prepare for the transition, and how to cope.

If your last or sole child is all grown up and about to leave home — or he or she has already moved out — you might be experiencing some mixed emotions. Understand why empty nest syndrome happens and what you can do about it.

### **What's empty nest syndrome and why do some parents experience it?**

Empty nest syndrome isn't a clinical diagnosis. Instead, it's a phenomenon in which parents experience feelings of sadness and loss when the last or sole child leaves home.

Although you might actively encourage your children to become independent, the experience of letting go can be painful. You might find it difficult to suddenly have no children at home who need your care. You might miss being a part of their daily lives — as well as the constant companionship. You might also worry intensely about your children's safety and whether they'll be able to take care of themselves on their own. You might struggle with the transition if your child leaves the nest a little earlier or later than you expected — or at a time different from when you did. If you have only one child or strongly identify with your role as parent, you might have a particularly difficult time adjusting to an empty nest.

### **What's the effect of empty nest syndrome?**

In the past, research suggested that parents dealing with empty nest syndrome experienced a profound sense of loss that might make them vulnerable to depression, alcoholism, identity crisis, and marital conflicts.

However, recent studies suggest that an empty nest can also provide parents with many benefits. When the last child leaves home, parents have a new opportunity to reconnect with each other, improve the quality of their marriage and rekindle interests for which they previously might not have had time.

### **How can I cope with empty nest syndrome?**

If you're experiencing feelings of loss due to empty nest syndrome, take action. For example:

**Accept the timing.** Avoid comparing your child's timetable to your own personal experience. Instead, focus on what you can do to help your child succeed when he or she does leave home.

**Keep in touch.** You can continue to be close to your children even when you live apart. Make an effort to maintain regular contact through visits, phone calls, emails, texts, or video/Skype chats.

**Seek support.** If you're having a difficult time dealing with an empty nest, lean on loved ones and other close contacts for support. Share your feelings. If you feel depressed, consult your doctor or a mental health provider.

**Stay positive.** Thinking about the extra time and energy you might have to devote to your marriage or personal interests after your last child leaves home might help you adapt to this major life change.

**Begin engaging in interests.** Generate a list of activities that have interested you in the past, but may have been put on hold while you raised the family. Or, write a list of interests that you have always wanted to pursue but didn't have time. Begin implementing these interests into your daily routine, so that they over time they begin to feel natural and not something to "fit in."

### **Can I prevent empty nest syndrome?**

If your last child is about to leave home and you're worried about empty nest syndrome, plan ahead. Look for new opportunities in your personal and professional life. Keeping busy or taking on new challenges at work or at home can help ease the sense of loss and emptiness that your child's departure might leave you experiencing.

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