

How you can enjoy the empty nest

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Sending children off to college or into the real world is usually a proud time for parents. But there also can be sadness, especially when it's the last child to leave home. 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 child leaves home.

"It's common for [parents](#) to find letting go to be a painful experience - even though they actively encourage their children to be independent," says Dr. Jessica Sosso, Family Medicine, Mayo Clinic Health System. "Parents might find it difficult to suddenly have no children at [home](#) who need their care. They might miss being a part of their children's daily lives and their constant companionship. Parents with only one [child](#) or those who strongly identify with their role as a parent might have a particularly difficult time adjusting."

Sosso explains that as hard as the change may be, having an empty nest can bring benefits to parents. Recent studies suggest that an empty nest might reduce work and family conflicts. Having an empty nest also gives parents 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.

If you're experiencing feelings of loss due to empty nest syndrome, Sosso suggests these tips:

- Accept the timing.

Avoid comparing your child's timetable to your own experience or expectations. Instead, focus on what you can do to help your child succeed when he or she leaves home.

- Keep in touch.

You can continue to be close with your [children](#) after they leave home, thanks to phone calls, emails, texts, video chats and personal visits.

- Seek support.

Lean on loved ones for support. Share your feelings. If you feel depressed, consult your [health care provider](#).

- Stay positive.

Think of the extra time and energy you will have to devote to your marriage or personal interests.

"If your last child will soon be leaving home, planning ahead can help keep empty nest syndrome at bay," says Sosso. "Look for new opportunities in your personal and professional life. Keeping busy or taking on new challenges at work or home can help ease the sense of loss."

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