

Empty Nesters



The natural transition period of children growing up, leading more independent lives and leaving the family home, can cause many parents to experience feelings of sadness, loneliness, loss of purpose and meaning, and anxiety over a child's welfare.

These feelings are normal and are commonly described as "Empty Nest Syndrome". This is not a clinical disorder or diagnosis, but parents do commonly struggle to regain their sense of identity, purpose, combat loneliness and often face new challenges once their children have left home.

Consider the following five tips and strategies to combating the symptoms of empty nest syndrome.

1. Focus on your needs

For many parents, much of their life has been spent being a caregiver, looking after others and putting their children's needs before theirs.

When a child leaves the 'nest', it is a perfect opportunity to remember what it is like to be selfish. Focussing on your own wants and needs first is a good way to re-occupy your time and re-establish what you enjoyed before you had children.

Embracing your selfish side entails doing the things you enjoy but never had the time. Think about the people you want to see, places to go, things you want to try, books to read, recipes to cook and projects you want to make. Make a list of things you want to achieve and do them at your own pace and in your own time.

2. Re-ignite your relationship.

Intimate relationships can encounter some challenges during parenthood and the empty nest transition period. Once children have grown up and moved out, it is the perfect opportunity to reconnect, rekindle and re-engage with your significant other, emotionally, physically and intimately.

Exploring why you feel in love with each other and spending quality time together is a great way to revitalise your relationship and plan for your future together.

Re-kindling your relationship does not have to be hard or expensive, small daily activities and gestures such as cooking together, going for afternoon walks and showing affection and appreciation towards each other will energise and establish a new kind of relationship.

"Once children have grown up and moved out, it is the perfect opportunity to reconnect, rekindle and re-engage with your significant other."

3. Engaging in hobbies and learning

Engaging in hobbies and life-long learning is a great way to enhance your physical and mental health, address your emotional and spiritual needs, manage and reduce stress and find a work/life balance. A good way to brainstorm hobby and learning ideas is to make a list of key activities you currently engage in regularly that help keeps you well, balanced and happy. Then, identify new strategies that you would like to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance and self-care that fit into the following categories:

- physical health
- emotional and spiritual needs
- managing and reducing stress
- nurturing relationships and finding balance in work and life.

Think of areas that you may not have explored in the past but would like to try, such as a runners club, volunteering, attending adult learner's classes or engaging in regular counselling.

4. Getting involved in your community

Getting involved in your community can have enormous benefits for you, your family and your community. Being involved in your community doesn't have to be difficult; you can volunteer at your own pace and within an area that aligns with your skills and interests. Volunteering can increase your self-confidence, help you learn new skills, provides a sense of purpose and benefits your physical and mental health. The scope of volunteering is endless; you could get involved at your local neighbour day event, sports club, school, community garden, political party, local library, animal shelters, service organisations such as Lions Clubs and Rotary clubs, and places of worship. While you may be time-limited, involvement in your community can provide an enormous sense of achievement, belonging and pride.

“Joining a group is one of the most effective ways of counteracting depression and loneliness, increasing your lifespan.”

5. Quality family time

Just because your children have moved out of home, doesn't mean you can't see or communicate with them regularly and foster loving and respectful relationships. Parents and children can benefit from spending regular quality time together; regular catch-ups can be paramount in building and fostering stronger

family relationships. Organising weekly or fortnightly dinner or outings will help strengthen family ties and enable continued bonding. Continued regular engagements also help create a stronger emotional bond, which allows for better communication between family members and creates continued memories.

About Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations.

For over 70 years, we have been supporting children, adults, families and communities.

As a federation of Relationships Australia organisations in each state and territory, we have over 118 service locations across the country, with our National Office based in Canberra.

We provide a broad range of services including counselling, family dispute resolution and mediation, family violence prevention, support and recovery services, and mental health services.

Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Relationships Australia receives funding from the Commonwealth Government, as well as state and territory governments, and other sources.



Next steps

For more information on our services and how they can support you, or to find your nearest centre:

Call 1300 364 277

Visit www.relationships.org.au