

The Kids Are NOT OK



When Adult Children Flock Back to Their Parents' Nest

By Susan Newman, Ph.D.

You may have sent your kid off to college, but now, 4 years later, you find they have boomeranged back! You aren't alone. A generation of young adults are moving back home.

What can a parent do?

Have you ever been out to dinner with friends, sharing the details of life, work, vacation plans, your health, and then, as it always does, the conversation turns to how your adult children are doing? Your answer is likely predictable: "The kids are okay."

The truth is that some of those kids, who are in their twenties and thirties, are not okay. They're failing to thrive on their own. Despite having every advantage in life, many adult children are not growing into the independent, successful, contributing citizens we expected them to be. Instead, they are choosing to move back home "just until they get on their feet".

Hey, Mom, I'm Back Home!

Almost half of this year's newly minted grads returned to the nest following commencement, most planning to stay six months to a year, but will wind up staying

longer. Many of last year's grads continue to live at home. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2007 graduates join the 65 percent of recent college grads already living in childhood bedrooms and spare guest rooms.

Parents often wonder what they did wrong when their college graduates are not immediately independent. Rest assured, you didn't fail as a parent. Times have changed, and not favorably. Where we, the baby boomer generation, took our parents' values and went on to create secure lives for ourselves and our families, this new "boomerang generation" is having a difficult time starting their own lives.

With low take-home pay for college grads, high rental costs, a very tight job market, and large college loans to repay; it comes as no surprise that more adult children are returning home, including those who have lived on their own for a while.

The need for more education in the form of advanced degrees, wanting to save for a bigger or better place, job loss and divorce keep the boomerang generation growing at a rapid pace.

Although the stigma of children returning home after college or years later is gone, many families discover that free rent comes at a price. Nestling in with mom and dad may start out as a financial issue, but quickly blossoms into something else entirely. In a world that couldn't care less, it is comforting to depend on parents for emotional support as well as some of life's necessities. So, when your adult child comes home to nest, what can a parent do?

Revise Old Arrangements

It can be easy to surrender boundaries for the joy of having your children home, for what can, if you're not careful, turn into years and decades. Parents' dependence, as much as anything else, can prevent an adult child from ever leaving once he or she is contentedly ensconced. When Mom and Dad take good care of their offspring, the way they used to, what's not to like?

You want to be certain you don't slip back into childhood rearing patterns, where Mom and Dad are doing everything. The return of a college educated child calls for readjustments in attitude and expectations. This isn't the same rebellious, perhaps a trifle inconsiderate, teenager who left a few short years ago. Although, it may feel that way, when your son or daughter once again returns the car with an empty gas tank, leaves the lights on all night, and piles dirty laundry sky high on the floor in the bedroom, the bedroom that you now consider your office or den.

Your "new" resident is not a guest, but a family member who should share the burden of running the household. No longer a helpless baby, and perfectly capable of pitching in, you'll have to ask for what you want: help with the yard work, picking up the dry cleaning, grocery shopping regularly or occasionally, assistance with meal

preparation, etc. Have your able-resident do some of your laundry or agree that they will take care of their own. Being there and meeting every need does a grown child a huge disservice. Once they out on their own, they will be unable to care for themselves.

Set Boundaries Early

Clear boundaries reduce the disagreements that can readily dampen the emotional rewards of togetherness. At the same time, boundaries re-enforce parents' values and promote positive behaviors that lead to responsible, independent adult children.

We live in a culture of "yes parenting". Saying "no" is a learned skill, especially when you have to direct it at children, whatever their ages. If you want to safeguard your time, avoid aggravation, resentment, and keep your sanity, brush up on your NO skills. For example, say "no" to preparing dinner every night, especially without your adult child's aid; say "no" to doing a grown child's laundry; "no" to glasses and dishes left in the sink; and "no" to any other little things that annoy you.

Because returning children have been independent for a number of years, you'll have to be somewhat flexible with rules. The 11:00PM curfew you enforced during high school won't work now. However, you can insist on a call before a designated time when he or she is not going to be home for dinner. If your child is not coming home to sleep, be sure they understand they must let you know, especially if you are a worrier who can't sleep until everyone is accounted for.

Honor Your Comfort Level

It is your home, and if sleepovers with the opposite sex make you uncomfortable, tell your son or daughter, "not in our house." The same goes for alcohol and parties, if they go against your wishes. Don't wait until the drinking bash occurs or you encounter a partially dressed young man or woman in the hallway at 3:00AM. You will need to be prepared to accept reality. If your daughter is sleeping with someone, don't

pretend it's not happening. Having her return home alone at three in the morning presents safety issues you'll want to consider. Similarly, having a guy or gal sleep in a separate bedroom may just be silly given that you know she's been on her own and making these decisions for herself for several years. Discuss your feelings and rules as soon as your child returns home to avoid problems and misunderstandings down the road.

Rent: To Pay or Not to Pay

Beyond establishing boundaries and comfortable levels, parents frequently have difficulty deciding if their adult child should pay rent. They want their children to "get on their feet" financially, but they also believe paying rent, even a small amount, encourages responsibility and is a symbol of maturity. For those who are job hunting (and those not) support around the house may be payment enough for you.

For offspring with jobs, determine a realistic amount together. What you do with the money is your decision. You may need it to run the household, or you may decide to put it in a savings account, to give back as a going-away gift. They can use these funds to pay security deposits and moving expenses or even a down payment on a first home. Some parents prefer not to collect rent and advise their children on savings and saving plans.

Create an Exit Plan

Early on, talk about and establish an exit plan, not a hard and fast deadline, but a timeframe when you expect your child to leave. If you have a hoped-for plan in place, your son or daughter has a goal to work toward. Without it, you run the risk of enabling and allowing him to coast, and take advantage of the good things you provide. A stated date will urge your child toward career success and independence.

Don't Stop Your Life

One of the major pitfalls of having your children return home is

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waiting to make your plans, until they firm up theirs. Or worse, giving up what you enjoy, on the possibility (and often it's quite remote) that your child will be around that evening. Recognize that your adult children, hopefully, will be putting all their time and energy into making contacts with old and new friends, and in short, trying to get their adult lives in order. Spending time with you is not their top priority.

It is very important for your own well-being, to keep commitments and social engagements in much the same way you did before the "boomerang." Your young adult can come home to an empty house, prepare dinner, and amuse himself. With you out, you give your young adult space to entertain guests without feeling inhibited by hovering parents.

Bear in mind: adult children leave at some point. You don't want to be in the position of having to recreate your social life again, so don't change it to accommodate an offspring who may cancel plans with you on a moment's notice.

Living Harmoniously

Once you've made the practical adjustments to daily living with your grownup offspring, you can live peacefully together as long as you remember these final pointers:

- ✓ This changed person is used to living independently and may have different sleeping and eating habits, routines, and even different politics, from when he left. Be prepared to compromise and be accommodating.
- ✓ Respect your adult child's privacy: stay out of his or her room. If you don't see the mess, it can't drive you crazy.
- ✓ Don't pry into their personal lives. They'll let you know when there's something you need to know about their job hunt or social life.
- ✓ Be sympathetic to the feelings and challenges of your adult child who may be facing professional or personal setbacks. Offer to listen and offer advice ONLY IF asked.

- ✓ Stick to the agreed plan on ways in which your child contributes.
- ✓ Talk about behaviors that upset you right away, so tensions don't build, and you don't feel as if you're walking on eggshells all the time.
- ✓ Avoid the topics that triggered arguments during the preteen and high school years.
- ✓ Be wary of slipping back into your full-time, mommy-daddy parenting role or becoming overly involved with the daily struggles of your boomerang child.

The Ultimate Plus

When a graduate moves home as an adult, there's no question that the relationship has to be reinvented. Contributions and boundaries foster mutual respect. With it, you'll have the opportunity to know your offspring as a person and he/she can learn to know you as a grownup, rather than only as a parent.

As you enjoy being together, you build a warm, close, peer-to-peer relationship, and set in motion the beginnings of a true friendship that will last a lifetime. No question, that's the biggest perk of putting out the welcome mat and living together...again. GB

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Intuition

A gut feeling.

A hunch. Your sixth sense. You are an intuitive person, with the ability to just know things. Intuition is simply knowing, without knowing how you know.

Intuition is a powerful tool, but because it works in ways that we don't understand, we tend to shroud it in mystery, discount it and ignore it. The fact is, there are no real mysteries about intuition. It's simply the sum total of everything you've experienced in your life and stored in your subconscious mind. You've learned something from each experience and your subconscious mind allows you to associate your past experiences with your present ones. You draw mindful conclusions based on your deeply stored information. These "gut feelings" stem from real information. There's nothing mysterious about it.

Intuition is one of the best-kept secrets around. You can use it to

help you make better decisions and solve problems. When you solve a problem or make a decision, it's best to gather all the information first. Remember, your intuition is an additional source for gathering information, not a substitute.

You can learn to use your intuition by developing and practicing your self-observation skills.

1. Ask. When making a decision, ask yourself how you are feeling about it.

2.Be observant. Capture your first impression about people, situations and decisions. It is usually the right one.

3.Trust yourself. Allow your feelings to be one of your deciding factors.

4.Keep score. As soon as you see how accurate your "hunches" are, you'll start paying more attention to your intuition.

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