



For many modern families, the actual dynamic of which family members live in the home changes over time: A couple lives together, marries, and has children. The children become adults and move on, leaving the couple on their own again. Today, that may not be the end of the story, as adult children or parents of adults move back to the nest.

Empty Nesters

Parents whose children have grown and left home make up a rapidly expanding portion of American households. It was once believed that it was a sad time for parents when their kids left home. But today's empty nesters are more likely to feel a renewed sense of personal freedom.

The adjustment can be hard, however, in the early weeks when parents often feel "homesick" for their children. Rather than constantly bemoaning your circumstances (even close friends will tire of it), focus on positive things you can do with your new independence - all those things you haven't had time for in the last twenty years or so!

Return to Nesters

Sometimes that empty nest fills up again. Children graduate from college, change jobs, break up with a significant other, or move back to town. They have nowhere to go except the one

place that always holds a welcome -home. However, things have changed. The kids are now adults in their own right; the parents have adjusted to a new, childless lifestyle. While on their own, the kids have established their own "house rules" and ways of doing things. But back home, doesn't Mom still deal with the grocery list and Dad pay the electric bill? There's much to learn about living together again, and it can be a rocky road until new ground rules are negotiated. Some basic etiquette skills and good communication can help. Here are the top issues that should be discussed, preferably prior to the "return to the nest":

- **Schedules.** Both adult children and parents are used to coming and going as they please. They should let each other know of any schedule changes that will affect the other.

- **Guests.** They should let each other know when they're planning to have guests over so everyone is aware the shared living spaces may be tied up. Set up a procedure for dealing with schedule conflicts.

- **Responsibilities.** Have a respectful but candid discussion about household chores and financial contributions. If the back-to-the-nester is short on funds, she may run errands, provide lawn care, cook, clean, or do laundry to help out. If rent being paid (a good idea if possible), agree on a due date.

- **Food.** Agree on a fridge rules - what's available to be eaten and what's off-limits.

- **Quiet times.** A note to parents: You may still work 9 to 5 and sleep from 10 to 6, but your daughter's waitressing job may be from 6:00 PM to midnight and her sleep hours 3:00 AM to 11 AM. You'll both require peace and quiet time.

- **Messages.** Even if they seem trivial to one person, messages may be important to another. Whatever the message, it should be legible and left where it's easily seen.

- **Respect shared spaces.** Bathrooms, living or family rooms, and kitchens are everyone's responsibility. Clean up after yourself and leave spaces as neat as you would expect to find them.

- **Privacy.** Closed doors should be respected. Knock before entering. Mail, journals, and computer files should be treated as private.

- **Respect other's belongings.** Do not "borrow" without asking. If you break something that belongs to someone else, be prepared to replace it.

When Parents Come to Stay in Your Nest

In a more mobile society, with young adults moving away to different cities and states, the elderly become more dependent on nursing homes, long-term care or assisted living facilities, and hired help in their own homes. However, some do move in with their children. This can be quite an adjustment for both children and their parents - especially as the elderly experience some of the frailties common with aging.

If your elderly parent has physical disabilities, you may need to make changes to your home.

Ramps, stair climbers, railings, and carpeting (as opposed to scatter rugs) may be necessary to prevent falls and help you parent cope with increasing weakness or loss of balance. While you can't force your parents to use a cane or walker, you may find yourself employing gentle nagging (just as they did with you when you were young). You may also need to make adjustments to shopping and meal preparation to meet special dietary needs.

If your elderly parent is experiencing dementia - memory loss or confusion - there are several things you can do to make life easier:

- Establish a routine and stick to it.
- Keep things in the same place. Don't move furniture around.
- Make sure there are night-lights in all the rooms your parent can access.
- When friends arrive, tell your parents their names and who they are. Link them to an event from the past that your parent might remember.
- If your parent can be a little combative, let your friends know in advance so they don't take it personally or get drawn into an uncomfortable discussion.

If you have friends with elderly parents living in their homes, you can help them out by offering to spend an evening so your friend can go out to dinner, or take their parent out for a car ride so your friend can have some time in the home alone. Ask if you can bring a meal over (check about any special diets first), or be clear with your friend that you're available to offer a hand. As with any offer of help, it's more useful to be specific: "Would you like me to take your mother for her hair appointment this week?"