

When The Nest "Un-Empty"

He's ba-ack!"

Now, before you let out a blood-curdling, horror-movie scream, dad, there's no need to worry. We're not talking about a masked movie stalker with nine lives - though, at times, you may wonder. Nope - we're talking about your young adult child.

This can be a real challenge for older parents. You raised the child from diapers to dormitory. There were surprises, but you pretty much knew how to handle 'em. Then he went out on his own, and it took time, but you adjusted.

And now—for whatever reason—he's back home. What are the rules for this new arrangement? What about chores, curfews and financial issues? And how long can we let this go on? What do you do when your young adult son calls up and says, "Hey, Dad, can I move back into my old room for a while?" There's a lot more to it than simply moving all the stuff you've been storing in his closet.

In their book, *Parenting Your Adult Child*, Ross Campbell and Gary Chapman offer some helpful ideas for handling this situation—which can be a great time with your son or daughter, or a time of great tension and strife.

First and foremost, you have to **clarify expectations**. If mom and dad expect one thing and your son or daughter expects another—or even if she doesn't know what to expect—then you're headed for a battle. So sit down together and agree on how this arrangement will work—what she'll do around the house, what she'll pay, if anything, what happens when she stays out late at night, and so on. Ground rules are a great foundation for harmony.

Second, **maintain open communication**. Have a regular three-way conference—you, your wife, and your adult child—where everyone can share ideas and feelings, and work toward a consensus. Listen carefully to your child's thoughts and desires. You eventually need to do what's right in the situation, no matter what your child thinks. But make sure your child is heard and her opinion is given proper respect.

And third, **balance freedom and responsibility**. This is really part of parenting a child of any age. And, hopefully, you've been building to this point. It should come as no surprise that she will be expected to help out around the house, help with finances, keep her room reasonably clean, and observe common courtesies to the other members of the household.

Number four is to **honor your moral values**. It's common for a young adult to disagree with his parents on some important issues. But since it's your home, you have every right to say, for example, that a girlfriend or boyfriend is welcome to visit, but not to sleep over. Or that you don't allow alcohol or tobacco in your home. You aren't forcing your values and convictions on your child, you're simply expecting him to respect your beliefs while he's living there.

Fifth, **give consideration to your own health and peace of mind**. If you know that you'll stay up worrying at night if your daughter isn't home, then it's reasonable to ask her

to be in by a certain time. You don't have to change your entire lifestyle just because she moved back home. You can both make some adjustments out of consideration for each other.

And finally, when an adult child has moved back home, **set time limits and goals**. It's easy for a young adult to procrastinate getting on with life. He needs to know that this is temporary. Set a time of six months or a year-or base it on his wedding date or his first promotion at work. You can always renegotiate, but that ending date can serve as a valuable motivator for your child.

Dad, it's important to love and accept your adult child as you help him become more independent. With your help, he'll move forward with confidence and maybe even a new appreciation of all you've done for him.

Take another deep breath, you can weather this new time in your life.