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## **The Empty Nest: It's not completely empty**

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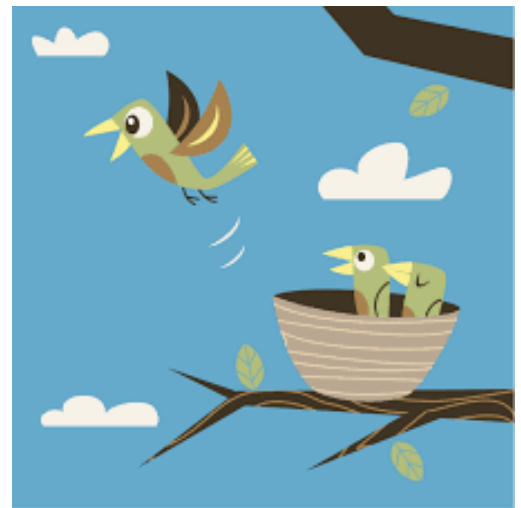
As a child who loved school, the end of summer was always a time of excitement over school supplies and new "school clothes". Who doesn't remember showing up for the first day of classes in the September heat wearing an overly warm sweater and long pants just because we had already deemed that our "first day" outfit?

As the years passed and I became a mom to three children, the end of summer meant squeezing in that last bit of time camping, going to the beach, and checking off books from our summer reading list.

Eventually, the end of summer meant buying sheets, a mini fridge, shower shoes and all the other necessities for our oldest to head off to college. It was a lot like gathering crayons, colored pencils, and glue sticks....except it wasn't.

This was, without being overly dramatic, a life-changing event. We would no longer be five people gathered around the dinner table at night. We would be missing a vital piece of our family puzzle. His contributions, his comments, his opinions, would all be missing from our family dynamic. Who would we rely on for providing the sarcasm, level-headedness, and tech support?!

Moving your child into their dorm and then driving away is not an easy task and even those of us who keep our emotions close to the vest might struggle with this. Remember, it is important to embrace your feelings and show your emotions. However, it is also important not to burden your child with worries of how mom or dad are coping. It's a balance between letting them know you're sad and going to miss them, but that you are so excited for their next chapter and this new life ahead of them.



The first few weeks are difficult for everyone. Then your child comes home with a giant sack of laundry and you realize that there are some things you like about this new way of life. Until..... your last baby bird flies away and you realize you're dealing with AN EMPTY NEST!!

The empty-nest syndrome is defined as a psychological condition that can affect parents, potentially causing feelings of grief, loss, fear, inability, difficulty in adjusting roles, and change of parental relationships, when children leave the parental home.

Luckily, this doesn't just happen out of the blue. Usually, we parents are part of the planning process with our kids, helping them choose a school or find an apartment. So we do have time to get our heads wrapped around this concept.

Based on life experience, here are a few tips I think are helpful for anyone dealing with an empty nest:



- Strengthen your relationship with your spouse/significant other. We're often focused on raising our children and being good parents, but we need to remember to be good partners too. That's who you are left with at the dinner table every night!
- Rekindle relationships that you may have let go of in the past because you just didn't have enough time.
- Join a group. Book club, yoga, cycling. Whatever might interest you.
- Volunteer. There is always a group, charity, school, food bank, church, etc looking for help.
- Learn a new skill. Try music lessons. Or cooking! Pottery, painting...The list goes on.

This is an excellent time to model behavior for your child. Show them that you not only roll with changes but that you embrace them. They are going off to learn, grow, make new friends and try new things. Why shouldn't you too?

And after some time goes by and that empty nest starts to get a little dusty....Maybe it's time for a house remodel....A little re-purposing and redecorating goes a long way to change your mood and firmly establish that your house may be a little emptier than in times past but it can still be full of life and purpose! After all, the nest isn't totally empty. You are still in it!!