

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY™

HELP!

**MY ADULT
CHILD WON'T
LEAVE HOME**

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WON'T LEAVE HOME**

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Help! My Adult Child Won't Leave Home

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Foreword

Tim and Karen are an active couple in their mid-fifties with three grown kids. They've saved their money and invested well over the years, and Tim is planning to take an early retirement. They're looking forward to serving on a one-year medical mission project in Indonesia.

Last week they received a panicked call from their 27-year-old daughter, Kim, who lives in California. Kim shared that her five-year marriage is on the rocks and she has left her husband. In addition, the corporation she works for has just announced a major layoff, leaving her jobless. She was calling her parents to ask if she can move back home and live with them—beginning next week.

Millions of American families have adult children living at home, and the phenomenon is growing. Sociologists call them “boomerang kids”—young adults who either continue living at home after high school or college or return to live with their parents after living on their own for a time. The reasons are as varied as the personalities of the kids.

If you’ve suddenly found yourself in a position similar to Tim and Karen’s, you’ve come to the right place. Stephen Bly’s book will help you navigate the sometimes rough waters that families experience when adult children and their parents live in the same household. He’ll teach you how to determine if the living arrangement is a healthy one, how to negotiate appropriate limits and boundaries, and how to determine when it’s time to gently push an adult child “out of the nest.” He’ll also

address difficult issues such as when to evict an adult child because of destructive behaviors. Along the way, he'll provide you with some key spiritual insights through the parable of the prodigal son.

We hope you'll find this book to be a helpful resource as you attempt to strike a balance between love and limits in your relationship with your adult child.

Dr. Bill Maier

Vice President, Psychologist in Residence

Focus on the Family



Part
One

**The Crowded
Nest:
When Adult
Children Live
at Home**

Jason lives down the street and drives a black '65 Corvette that he keeps shined to mirror perfection. Every Friday and Saturday night, he takes the 'vette into the city and cruises 21st Street. To maintain the expense of repairs, insurance, and general upkeep of such a rig, Jason works at odd jobs around town. He house-sits, paints barns, and drives a truck during harvest.

Sounds like an industrious 17-year-old with expensive tastes, doesn't he?

But Jason is 31 years old and still lives at home with his parents, Matt and Sherry. He has attended seven different colleges, never spending more than a couple of months at any of them. He's had great jobs, lousy jobs, but mostly no jobs. Matt pays the light bill, the mortgage, and for groceries. Jason, when he has the money, pays for the cable TV.

Five times Jason left home to begin an

independent life; five times he returned. Matt and Sherry sometimes feel resigned, sometimes angry, and sometimes like failures. Often they just feel trapped.



Trisha was a junior in college, living 900 miles from home, when she decided to get married—to a divorced man 10 years her senior. Her parents tried to persuade her to wait until after graduation. They warned her that it would be difficult. They cautioned her about dropping out of school. They described how tough life can be in the big city.

Three years, two children, and countless bruises and black eyes later, Trisha and the kids took the Greyhound bus back to her parents' house. Dad now pays the bills, and Mom works at the insurance company until noon, then baby-sits the kids. Trisha

returned to college and is working toward a teaching degree. She spends every day at school and every evening doing homework.

The nest is more than full—it's crowded.



Whether our adult children live at home, across town, or across the country, we parents fill a unique role in their lives. Our roles will change and vary with age and circumstances, but we will always be parents. And our job is never finished. In a sense, because we will always be Mom and Dad, we will always be “parenting.”

Up to this point, we have interjected our parenting into our children's lives in decreasing levels of intensity. But from this point on, we must stop altogether. The adult child must now determine when and where our love, wisdom, and skills are needed.

Few parents nowadays complain about the crisis of an empty nest. Rather, they shudder at the thought that the nest will never become empty. Maybe you're thinking the same thing, and that's why you picked up this book. We'll look at how to handle destructive behavior and when and how to move an adult child out, but we'll also consider how to make the arrangement work if your child has to live with you awhile longer. This book is about:

- real moms and dads,
- real adult children,
- none perfect,
- and, at times, all in less-than-ideal situations.

A number of interesting acronyms have developed to describe this situation. Maybe what you need at home is PRI—you know, Premarital Residential Independence.¹

Many parents face the dreaded affliction of RYAS—Returning Young Adult Syndrome.²

And then there's my favorite, ILYA. Some communities are littered with ILYAs—Incompletely-Launched Young Adults.³

Or, in terms you and I can understand, “The kids are still at home! What do I do now?” Or, “Help! Our kids moved back home!”

First, if you have adult children at home, relax! It's a common phenomenon. According to an article on the Web site SeniorJournal.com:

Twenty-five percent of Baby Boomers anticipate their adult children will move back in with them. Of Boomers polled, 15 percent have grown children

who already returned to the nest. Called “boomerang kids,” this is a growing social phenomenon.

Julie Tillson, 57, a high school teacher and resident of Del Webb’s Sun City Lincoln Hills in Northern California, has experienced the boomerang phenomenon firsthand. After going away to college for several years, her daughter returned home. “Stephanie moved back in with us for three months,” Tillson said. “She needed to because of financial reasons. It was horrible at first. She felt like a failure and it was hard. But by the time she moved out again, we were sorry to see her go.”

Today more than 25 percent of Americans ages 18 to 34 live with their parents, according to U.S. Census fig-

ures. For 18- to 24-year-olds, 56 percent of men and 43 percent of women live with one or both parents. These numbers may increase too. According to a job search Web site, 62 percent of college students say they expect to live at home after graduation.⁴

Second, if you have adult children at home, don't apologize for it. It's not necessarily a sign of failure. Success is not determined by economic good fortune, scholastic achievements, social popularity, or how rapidly or slowly children pull away from their parents.

Why Adult Children Come Home

In recent years, several social factors have contributed to the fact that more and more adult children live at home.

Economics

“Most boom-era parents had the economic winds at their back,” writes Liz Pulliam Weston. “They graduated into a decent job market and enjoyed strong appreciation of their homes and (for the most part) stock portfolios. Today’s graduates, by contrast,



“Our single, 30-year-old daughter moved back home last April. She couldn’t find meaningful work in Denver, after being there for nearly five years, so we didn’t mind having her return. She stays in our basement apartment and pays \$300 a month for rent. Yes, we could use the money from a regular tenant, but she is quiet and keeps the place clean. She is working and paying off student loans. I’m happy she has a safe place to stay, but it has been an adjustment.”

are a bit more behind the eight ball: The economy is far from robust, meaning more 20-somethings are unemployed or underemployed. Instead of getting free money in the form of grants to pay for college, they're taking out student loans—an average of about \$20,000 at last count. And then there's the Demon Credit Card. . . . The median credit card debt for undergraduates has risen by 32 percent since 1998, to \$3,730, according to a Nellie Mae study.”⁵

In some fields, an overabundance of college graduates is applying for a limited number of job openings. This means employers can be selective and demand even more stringent training. That translates into graduate school, spiraling education costs, increased college indebtedness, doubled independent housing expenses, and more kids needing to stay with Mom and Dad . . . just a few more years.

Marriage Deterioration

After years of living in a society where divorce is presented as an agreeable alternative to working through difficult situations, many adult children more quickly jump to divorce or separation as the best solution available. The results of turbulent, broken relationships lead adult children to seek a place that provides security, stability, and acceptance. The natural inclination is to go home.

Frank Furedi, sociology professor at the University of Kent, adds: “In contrast to the insecurities attached to adult relationships, the security of the parental home can appear attractive. In these circumstances, the aspiration of young adults for autonomy can be diminished. Some young adults embrace a delayed phase of dependency, as independence becomes associated with unpredictable risks. . . .

Many young adults who manage to move out of the family home end up constituting a rapidly growing group of singletons. Being single has become a way of life for millions of men and women in their twenties and thirties. . . . In the USA singletons are the fastest growing demographic group.”⁶

The Push toward Quality Careers

Only a few decades ago, most folks were satisfied with a job that paid the bills and provided stability. Now, such employment is touted as inferior. A job must be personally fulfilling. It must challenge the inner person. It must be an extension and expression of your own essence. It must lead to upward advancement. It must be exciting. Careers like that are sometimes hard to find.

Brett spent nine years driving a cement

truck. On his twenty-seventh birthday, he realized he wanted more out of life. He moved back home and is taking art classes at the university. If you ask Brett, he'll tell about someday having his own studio and gallery. If you talk to his folks, they'll tell you they don't have a clue how long Brett will be living with them.

The Comfort-of-Home Factor

Let's face it. Some of us just might be reaping the rewards of our success. We worked hard to make our homes safe, comfortable, relaxed, enjoyable retreats for our children while they grew up in a rather frightening and hostile world. Now that they have reached adult age, some children are in no hurry to abandon the comfort of the world we have created for them.

Nels and Germaine worked hard to fix up the rather run-down home they inher-

ited from Germaine's parents. By making a lot of sacrifices, they were able to turn the place into a showcase. They added a swimming pool and built a one-room cabana next to it, complete with mini-kitchen, game room, and bathroom.

Their son, Jensen, has been the produce manager at the supermarket for three years. He had supposedly been looking for his own place, but he can't find anything that compares to the poolside cabana at home. Chances are he never will.

The Extension of Adolescence

"Society has come to accept the idea that people do not become adults until they are in their late thirties. As a result, adolescence has been extended well into the twenties."⁷

"Anglo-American culture is ambiguous in its response to this development. The occasional outcry against some absurd

manifestation of this trend is drowned out by the powerful message that growing up is a troublesome and unpleasant activity.”⁸

Professor Furedi provides this example: “Fred Simons and Oliver Bailer, both real estate agents in their late twenties, play with their Nintendo and boast that they haven’t changed much since their school years. Helen Timerman, a 27-year-old designer, proudly shows me her collection of soft toys. She loves cuddling them and believes that her little animals, neatly arranged in her bedroom, give her a zone of security.”⁹

Six Problems to Anticipate When Adult Children Return Home

Obviously, having adult children move back home won’t always be smooth sailing. But it’s not unrealistic to expect that since it’s your home, you have the right to set

Notes

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