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When Your Firstborn Leaves For College

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My oldest son will be leaving for college at the end of the summer. I knew this day was coming -- he had taken the SAT, written all the essays for the applications and had been waiting to see where he wanted to go. Since he got accepted, I have decided to remain in a state of denial that at some point soon, he will be leaving our house. I've heard it's the last child to leave, not the first, that is the hardest. I think anytime one of your children leaves you, it changes you. Seeing his room not being slept in will cause a stir inside me every time I walk by.

After knowing every night where he has been for 18 years, I will have no idea where he is most of the time. He will be free to not have to text us if he's going to be out very late, he won't have to make his bed if he doesn't want to and he won't have to clean up after the dogs. He will be independent and free and I will be up wondering if he's safe. Will I eventually get used to not hearing his television through his closed door, or him asking me to make his breakfast every morning?

Just like every other thing in life that I'm not thrilled about, I have to learn to accept this. But how do I move on from taking care of my child? The person who came out of my body making nonstop demands? The kindergartener I said goodbye to in the morning, but

who happily came back every afternoon? This time, I will say goodbye to him and he won't be back for a long time.

This is the beginning of the rest of his life, but to some extent it is also the beginning of a new life for me. A life I will have to adjust to. Even though I will still have my younger son home for a few more years, our household will look and feel very different. No more Sunday night family dinners with the four of us. No more watching "The Middle" together on the couch. No more lazy Sunday mornings where there are four snoring people in the house.

My oldest will probably never live under our roof full-time again. He will be responsible to make his own decisions, care for his own safety and take into account his own health. I will be able to ask questions, but will never really know if he's following my advice or just telling me the answers he knows I want to hear. He will make his own mistakes and have to pick up the pieces and fix them himself. Feeling responsible for him will be a hard thing for me to let go of.

I've asked myself what the job is of a parent when your child is old enough to leave the nest. Do we stop being parents just because our children no longer live under our roof? I'm over 50 and my parents still see me as their child, but do they still really think of themselves as my parent in the true sense of the word? They definitely don't try to give me advice anymore, or maybe they do and I still just ignore it. Maybe that's the job of a parent, to continue to give your kid advice even if they don't listen.

My son is excited about his new adventure, and that will make the pain

worth it. He hasn't given a thought to what we will do without him, and why should he? It is our job as parents to deal with our loss without putting it on our kids. Someday he will have his own kids, and then he will experience what his father and I will be going through for himself. At that point he will finally get what being a parent really means because not only will he understand our loss, but he will also have someone that ignores his good advice, too.

I've found a few ways to make this process easier, which might help you, too.

- 1. Don't look at it as you're life with your child is over; it's their life that is just beginning.** You've spent all their childhood teaching them to be independent and confident and this is your chance to see how successful you both are.
- 2. Remember that your child will have lots of breaks from school and when he can't come home, there's FaceTime and Skype.** FaceTime and Skype can be good and bad. Of course, being able to see their face will make you happy, but you'll also see they stopped making their beds, there's food and trash all over their room and you won't be able to distinguish between clean and dirty clothes because they'll be in one large heap. These things will actually ease your pain because you'll know that their room at home is finally clean.
- 3. Focus on yourself.** Are there things you've always wanted to do, but never got to because you were busy with your kids? Maybe now's the time to take up a hobby or attend that Pilates class you've been putting off.
- 4. Turn your attention to your remaining children at home.** I'm

sure they will be thrilled to have you paying even more attention to them than you did before. Teenagers love that.