



Life coach

How to survive an empty nest See it as a new start, says the author and journalist Celia Dodd...

You're likely to feel a confusing mixture of emotions when your child leaves home:

not just sadness and regret that it's the end of an era, but also pride at launching a fully-fledged adult into the world. You might even sigh with relief – conflict is all too common in the months before you say goodbye, when emotions are bound to run high.

Psychologists agree there are three things that help parents cope: facing up to your feelings, getting support from partner and friends, and finding interesting new activities. But while the prospect of more time and fewer domestic demands should be

exciting, the reality can often feel scary. Don't demand too much of yourself at first; start by focusing on the things that you genuinely love doing and find fulfilling.

Crucially, allow yourself time to take stock. The empty nest is a great chance to look back and recognise your achievements, as well as plan ways to make the most of your new-found freedom.

Finally, don't expect to 'get over it' immediately. This is a massive emotional and practical upheaval (however, if you're still weepy and inconsolable after a month, see your GP). Have faith that, in time, all the wonderful things about the empty nest will emerge, from more quality

time with your partner to greater opportunities to put yourself first and even forge a brand-new direction in life. Above all, your relationship with your adult child will continue to grow.

When your kids have flown, you can think about yourself



» *The Empty Nest: How To Survive And Stay Close To Your Adult Child* by Celia Dodd (Piatkus, £12.99)

THREE-STEP SOLUTION

Look forward to a new challenge

1 Plan ahead
Jot down three lists to refer to when you're feeling low – treats, such as books, movies and hobbies you've never got round to; long-term projects, and finally, holidays – destinations the kids would hate!

2 Face your feelings
Have a good cry over old family photos, but don't wallow and beware of being too nostalgic – remember the challenges of parenting as well as all the rosy memories.

3 Phone a friend
Talk to someone who acknowledges what you're going through and won't just try to jolly you out of it. Get in touch with friends you drifted apart from while busy with your family.

Best 2/8/11