



How to ENJOY AN EMPTY NEST

WHEN THE KIDS LEAVE HOME you can go round the world, start a new career and trade the people carrier for a Mazda MX-5. Empty-nest syndrome is a common cause of a midlife crisis, though few parents expect it to bother them. But working outside the home, as two-thirds of mums and most

dads do, is no protection from the loss you may feel when your chicks take flight. And if they boomerang back, you have to go through it all over again. So how do you survive?

Prepare for it as a family, says Celia Dodd, author of *The Empty Nest* (£12.99). Teaching kids a practical skill such as budgeting stops you fretting about how they'll cope. At the same time, start thinking positively about your future without rushing to fill your time as soon as they leave. "You need to take stock first," Dodd advises.

It's also an idea to keep plans fluid in case they return. "Don't act on the assumption that you can be totally 'me' based," warns psychologist Terri Apter. "Your kids still need you, but you don't know in what way." (Though you might guess:

9% of 70-year-olds are still financing their adult kids.) If, in contrast, you never hear from them, keep up the contact. "It's not that they don't want to talk to you, they're just busy. They need to know you're thinking of them," says Dodd.

While your new life is on hold, check that your partner shares your dreams. If you've communicated more with your child than your significant other over the years, he or she may have very different ideas, hence the rise of the "silver" divorce. But for most couples, the child-free future looks rosy. According to one US study, marriages improve when quality time is something couples spend on each other, not the kids.

"YOUR CHILDREN STILL
NEED YOU, BUT YOU DON'T
KNOW IN WHAT WAY"