

EMPTY NEST SYNDROME

What It Is And How To Cope

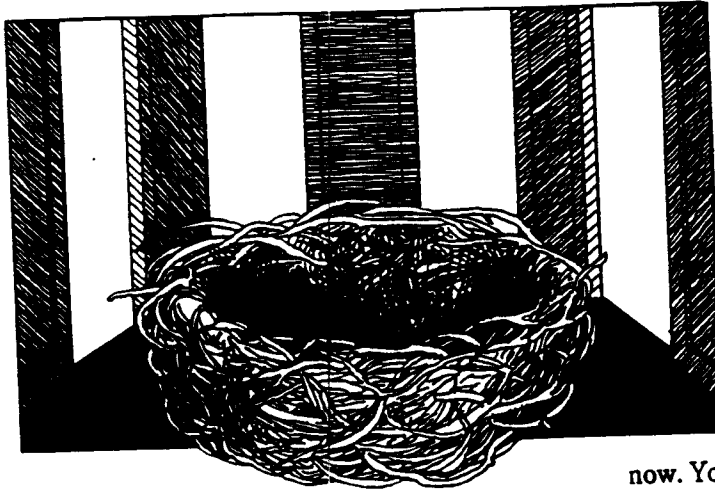
Have the lives of your children so filled your life that the realization that they will soon be gone leaves you sad? This is what the empty nest syndrome is all about. It signifies a new stage in your life.

A Women's Issue

The empty nest syndrome affects women more than men, although fathers also have to deal with the change. The syndrome was a common crisis years ago when most of our mothers were like "Beaver's" mother and stayed home full-time. Their life revolved around their children and making their home a haven. They were identified as someone's wife or mother. Who they were was closely linked to their family role. When their children left, many felt empty and lost because they now felt useless with no future.

Times have changed and the vast majority of women enter the work force before their children leave their home. This gives women the chance to find stimulating work inside and outside of the home. Women have options to develop their own identity like past generations were not able to. Today's full-time homemakers are also better at developing their own identity and don't necessarily fall prey to the syndrome.

How you feel about your child's leaving is probably mixed. You are a



Doors of opportunity can open to you with the redirection of your time and energies.

little relieved to have some privacy, quiet and some time to develop your own interests. But you also feel sad because that child you loved and nurtured is leaving, and you don't remember life without a child. You also worry about your child's safety, see this process as a fact that you are aging and know that there will be some emptiness from losing the daily responsibility for this cherished human being.

How To Cope

The most important thing is to develop your own identity throughout your childrearing years. It is important to give yourself space and time. Set personal goals that don't involve your family. Take art classes, try your hand at writing or

read a book a week.

It is essential to spend time together as a couple while rearing your children. You don't want to wonder who that stranger is sleeping in your bed and have forgotten the reason you chose him for a mate. If all you ever talked about was the kids, that mistake will haunt you now. You may find a marriage encounter group helpful or take time to renew your marriage through intimate talks to freshen the romance.

It helps to realize that letting go is a gradual process. The nest will not be truly empty because there will be many family events in the future. They will be different than your life before but still pleasurable. It must be noted that the nest is often refilled in our society. If your children come home to roost again, or your aging parents need care, it can refill your nest just as you were beginning to enjoy your freedom.

When To Seek Help

If you are trying to learn about who you are, and feel great loss and depression at the thought of change, you could benefit from professional counsel. You are at a great time in your life to open new doors. If you can only count up the losses and are unable to take pleasure in the pluses, it is time to get help in redirecting your life.

