

Back to the Nest

Parenting offers a new and different challenge when twenty-somethings come back home and rules need to change, but there's no blueprint to show how. Those of us who have young adults have been through all the developmental changes we expected to be dealing with – for better or worse. But suddenly more and more parents are finding themselves back in the trenches of day-to-day parenting with an older child who is either not quite ready to leave the nest, has flown the coop and come back to safety, or can't afford to live outside the nest.

We have expectations of children this age being in college, working, living in an apartment of their own, marrying and starting a family – becoming responsible citizens of the world. But living in the big world has become more difficult. Many of our graduates are not prepared for the work world (I won't get into our educational system), the cost of living has soared with no increase in minimum wage (I won't get into our politics), and rent is often out-of-reach to name only a few reasons. We have less trust in our society to support our children when they are of age to venture forth. For the first time in history, many of our children will not do better than we did.

So we are once again parenting. Do we change the rules? What are appropriate expectations? How much should they contribute? How do we give the extra help needed to ready them?

I have spoken to parents who rely on the tough-love approach. *If you can't hack it out there, you'd better be damned appreciative of living back home and show it. I expect help and money, and I don't want any complaining.* Paying rent, caring for the house, childcare of younger siblings, making meals may be appropriate if the situation fits the expectation. But most of us set expectations without exploring the situation.

Has your child failed in the outside world? Has it slapped her in the face a few times with rude awakenings she wasn't prepared for? Has he made mistakes

that has blocked moving ahead? Has she not been able to make enough money to get a leg up? Look closely at the reasons your child is home before setting rules. Are you resentful that you are parenting this child again? Are the voices of your friends and relatives telling you what your child should or should not be doing?

I don't have quick and ready answers, but I suggest being quiet with it. Before reacting with rules and regulations that might push your child away and provoke attitude and resistance, think carefully about how your child must be feeling. She too has lived with the same expectations of being out in the world by now. If she wasn't able to meet those expectations, how must that feel to her? Is she back because she's scared, doesn't feel ready or prepared? Has she been "kicked out" by failing in college or getting fired? If your child is feeling wounded and vulnerable, if she feels like a failure, tough-love is not the answer. She doesn't want to be home any more than you want her there, trust me.

Parents want their children to be happy and successful. When they are not, we catastrophize by assuming they will never make it, and we react with short tempers, impatience, and rules that only make the situation worse – all because we feel like the failure. Obviously, we didn't do our job in preparing our child, and now we don't know what to do. So as not to lose face as the authority, we act tough and make the situation worse.

Home is your child's safety net and always should be. Making it comfortable and safe does not mean he will never want to leave. If home is a loving, accepting environment, it becomes his strong foundation for his own life and family. We should not withdraw support and the comfort of home from our children no matter what. Perhaps your little bird just needs a bit more time. The more helpful and supportive the nest, the sooner he will fly.

Don't ask for rent if it's a hardship for her to pay it. This may be the only time she has to collect a nest-egg to help her get started. By all means expect help around the house. But be careful that your attitude in setting chores is not laced with resentment and disappointment. Resistance will be just as strong as it ever

was and more, because she resents being parented and told what to do when she is old enough to be on her own. If your attitude is, *Well, she should have thought of that before...* you're in for power struggles. And she's got a lot more power on her side now. Be careful that tough-love doesn't ruin your relationship. She will always have a clipped wing. Setting chores can be a mutually cooperative task. Remember she's an adult now (or almost), and wants to be treated like one. If she isn't acting like one, treating her like a child isn't going to help. Trusting her adult capabilities is what she needs to mend that wing so she can fly.