

Problem of Empty Nest Syndrome: An Analysis and Suggestions to Bridle it

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Abstract

In the present competitive world career and professional life has become so important for young people, that they need to leave their home willingly or unwillingly. This leaving home has huge effect on psychology of parents, especially in case the child is the youngest one. As leaving the youngest child will turn the home empty so the phenomenon has been named as 'Empty nest syndrome'. Author has attempted to analyse the problem of empty nest syndrome in terms of positive and negative effects. Paper starts with elaborating psychological state of parents which sounds shattered and isolated followed by pointing out various complexities created by virtue of the syndrome. Finally some suggestions have been put forward to come out from this psychological dead-lock. Paper ends with various suggestions by which parents can give direction to their mental health for the sake of their wards' future. Parents need to be vigilant in this regard because young generations' future is at stake and by adjusting to this they can do a lot for their loved ones.

Keywords: Empty nest, Psychological, Loneliness, Sadness, Insecurity, Depression

Introduction

Empty nest syndrome refers to the grief that many parents feel when their youngest children move out of home. In other words empty nest syndrome is a feeling of grief and loneliness that parents or guardians may feel when their children leave home for the first time, such as to live on their own or to attend a college or university and even get married in some cases. This condition is typically more common in women who are more likely to have had the role of primary carer. In-fact empty nest syndrome is not a clinical diagnosis. Instead, empty nest syndrome is a psychological phenomenon in which parents experience feelings of sadness and loss when the child leaves home. The symptoms of empty nest syndrome often go unrecognised at initial stage, but can turn out to be chronic if ignored or unattended. Full time (mother and father stay at home) or retired parents are more vulnerable to empty nest syndrome compare to working parent. The nest of family is like a nest of birds which is there for habitation. But

members come and go on temporarily or on permanent basis. When it is the right time to fly, the young ones will fly away, as it is the way of life. Psychologist Allan Scheinberg notes that these "boomerang kids" want the "limited responsibility of childhood and the privileges of adulthood" (Psychology Today). This kind of interpretation also makes this condition a serious syndrome.

How it creeps in

Although a mother might be actively encouraging her children to become independent, but the experience of letting him/her go can be painful. She might find it difficult to suddenly have no children at home who need your care and attention. She may be ready in the morning to prepare breakfast, iron his dress or packing the school bag, but he is not there for all these takes. She will miss for being a part of your child's daily routine -as well as the constant companionship. She might also worry intensely about child's safety and whether he will be able to take-care of

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himself on his own. She might struggle with the transition if the last child leaves the nest a little earlier or later than expected or at a time different from when you did. If she has only one child or strongly identify with her role as parent, she might have a particularly difficult time adjusting to an empty nest. It is matter of possessiveness a mother experiences while accompany the child and emptiness of that possession in absence of the child.

Wallops of empty nest syndrome

Empty nest syndrome usually has adverse effects. Some of the adverse effects are mentioned below:

Depression

Parents may feel depressed when the child leaves home to find his ways. Depression intruded into their minds as they feel lonely and grief stricken. Depression happens to be due to unpreparedness for the event, or lack of practice of loneliness by permitting the child for short visits. There may be a case that event has come unplanned like leaving for abroad by virtue of some scholarship or so. This depression could cause a sea of other problems.

Alcoholic

Sometimes the pain to get separated from young ones is so much that some parents may go alcoholic. They want to forget the bitter truth of their separation from their children. This may turn them to be bibulous. Alcoholic situation is more probable when the child has left the home against the wishes of the parents.

Identity crisis

Another impact of empty nest syndrome which shatters the parents from inside is the issue of their identity. They feel who they are? , what they are doing here? , why they are leading such life? Such questions make them serene and placid. They are sceptical to their identity. This mostly happens who associate their identity with their young ones. This identity association is due to some exceptional ability of possession with child which is socially recognised. Author Molly Edmonds of Discover Fit & Health (reference) writes the following: "If a woman has largely shaped her personal identity as that of mother, then an end to the reproductive years accompanied by a child leaving home can be especially traumatic. For this reason, the empty nest syndrome seems to strike stay-at-home mothers more than mothers who work full-time or part-time. Because stay-at-home mothers lack an immediate outlet for their time, they have more time to fixate on their loss. Women may also be more likely to suffer from empty nest syndrome if they have very traditional views of family and place a high value on a traditional maternal role."

- **Marital conflicts:** Some parents start indulging in conflicts to get rid of the frustration and inferiority complex came to their mind on the departure of their children. This ruins their married life in addition to peace of mind. Their married life becomes hell. This is nothing but a defence mechanism we call as shifting the focus.
- **Vulnerability:** Parents feel unsafe and unprotected as their children leave home. They feel isolated and aloof as their children go outside to make their destiny. They feel insecure in dealings with outer world. This vulnerability may be due to too much dependence on the child for day to day activity or for psychological solace or when they use the child as a representative face for social interaction.
- **Feel rejected:** Mostly all the parents feel rejected as their love ones leave home first time to find their way. A strong feeling of rejection and distress capture their mind. They feel as whole world has rejected them. This kind of situation comes when parents are too much attached to the child and had largely remained isolated from social circles. This rejection has very dangerous consequences.
- **Anxiety over child's euphoric:** Parents feel profoundly about wellbeing of their children who are out of home. Empty nest syndrome lead to anxiety among parents who concerned about petty issues like whether their wards have taken food, are they safe, and had they adjusted properly to new environment and many more like these. Anxiety turns the parent ineffective in even small routine works.
- **Emotional changeover:** Period of empty nest is period of emotional transition in which emotions takes new heights and victim of these changes are parents. This emotional changeover occurs when they see some child of same age, see some movie where character of the movie matches with their own child and similar such incidents.
- **Loss of motherhood:** Empty nest syndrome may lead to loss of motherhood. Now the mother who was earlier overburdened with various tasks of her child is now too much free. Actually mother has associated her motherhood with the small jobs she accomplishes for the child. Loosing motherhood is equivalent of loosing purpose in the life, specially it is true for children who have gone for long time and to long distances.
- **Superfluous life:** Life seems to be redundant and unneeded for parents as the young ones fly away from the nest of the family in search of new meanings for life. Life seems to be irrelevant to parents without their kids. They lead a life essentially purposeless and pointless. Routine activities loose significance and person becomes careless which some time turn to be fatal.
- Apart from adverse effects of empty nest, there are some favourable effects which are explained below:

- **New kind of relationship with adult children:** Parents face new relationship with adult children as children leaving home think differently from their parents. They probably have contrast views as regards life and career. Parents have to get accustomed to this new relationship, this turn them modernised and adjustable to new ways of life. Sometime they even become model or counsellor for other parents suffer from same syndrome.
- **Opportunity to re-connect:** Apart from the adverse effects of empty nest like loneliness, isolation, sadness etc. it has scope for parents to re-connect and for reunion. They now have more time for understanding and cooperation which hinders due to responsibility of their young ones. Thus, departure of child from home gives them opportunity to rectify their own relation and understandings. A 2008 study published in Psychological Science found that rather than heading for divorce court, most couples experienced a higher rate of marital satisfaction because they had more time together [source: Parker-Pope]. But the study revealed that it wasn't just quantity that counted, it was quality, likely because women were less taxed with housework or consumed with a child's demanding schedule [source: Association for Psychological Science].
- **Improve quality of married life:** Young ones' departure from home could lead to enhancement of quality of married life which might have deteriorated due to domestic obligations. After the departure of children they have time without obligations to look after their married life. In many studies on empty nest syndrome have been conducted on parents already seeking help or therapy for the condition [source: Forman; Raup, Myers]. In a survey of approximately 1,100 mothers, only 10 percent of those who had experienced an empty nest reported feeling acute loneliness or having trouble adjusting to the change. In the same survey, more than 25 percent of mothers said that their favourite stage of motherhood was, in fact, the one in which their children no longer lived at home [source: Forman].
- **Rekindle interests:** There is probability of arousing interests of parents which they halted due to their parental duties towards their young ones. Scarcity of time and burden of duties demolished their interests which could be rein-state by them after their children left home.
- **Stay connected:** Parents should keep in touch with their children to deal with empty nest syndrome. Today technological advancements have made it possible to get rid of isolation. Invention of mobile phones, e-mails, video calls etc. reduced the distances between towns, cities, states and even countries. Parents should use technology to keep the warmth intact.
- **Seek patronage:** When the young ones go outside, parents feel very much depressed and isolated. In such adverse situation parents should seek support of their near and dear ones and share their intense anxiety and emotions with them. In severe depression they must consult physician to regain their mental health. Following habits, interest, association with recreational circles can be very useful in tackling the stress.
- **Stay optimistic:** In order to face any adverse situation in life, one has to be optimistic and positive in their lives. Parents have to shed their negativism and pessimism and give priority to their child's future. Only positive attitude towards life can save them from psychological and physical damages.
- **Be occupied:** Parents should keep themselves engaged in professional and personal life. If they keep themselves busy the pain of being isolated can be retrenched. Mothers those are full time housewives are mostly victims of empty nest syndrome, they need to develop new interests, join social groups, besides doing domestic works in order to beat the empty nest syndrome.
- **Pursue hobbies:** Parents suffering from empty nest syndrome required to pursue hobbies which they could not carry on due to scarcity of time, domestic obligations, rearing of child etc. Now when they have time, almost no domestic obligations and fewer interruptions they must go for their hobbies. In this way they can re-ignite the interest for their hobbies on one hand and get themselves aloof from the negative effects of empty nest syndrome.
- **Enhance social participation:** Parents need to be actively participated in social functions and events which definitely help them to flourish their empty nest which minify due to their child's departure. Social participation will de-escalate their pain and insecurity.
- **Emotional intelligence:** Studies have shown that people with high emotional intelligence have greater mental health, exemplary job performance, and more potent leadership skills. Emotional intelligent parents can give right direction to their behaviour and thinking. Emotional intelligence will also help to curb the damages done by empty nest syndrome.
- **Boomerang generation:** Refers to a term applied to current generation of young adults and so named for the frequency with which they choose to cohabitate with their parents after a brief period of living on their own-thus boomeranging back to place of origin. Thus the "empty nest" can be converted into "crowded

How to harness empty nest syndrome

- **Credence the reality:** Parents have to accept the reality with strong positive attitudes as regards their kids. They have to be very robust if they really want to shape their child's future. In-fact, they should focus on what they can do to help their child to succeed when he/she departs home.

nest” by popularising boomerang generation concept.

- **Compensation:** Is a process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weakness by emphasizing strength in other arenas. When a father was unable to do much during his heydays, he sees his child’s progress as compensation for his failures. He should in-fact endorse his child in this regard. In this way he can diminish the effects of empty nest.

These are only some observations and suggestions made by the author on the basis of his experiences and whatever could be gathered from available literature. But there can be many more innovative solutions for the problem.

Concluding remarks

Empty nest syndrome is not a medical condition, rather it is a psychological one, so should be treated with psychological methods. It is part and parcel of life that people leave from and come to the nest. If this is assumed by parents, empty nest syndrome has no place in their life. Fitness-physical, mental and psychological is the key to handle or even avoid the syndrome. Keeping the life simple and building low expectations from young ones is an approach to life which saves us from such psychological takeover. All measures suggested in the article are actually needed to be adopted without being victim of empty nest syndrome. Give some space in home even to others than your own children, so that there should not be an event of absolute emptiness.

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