

Empty Nest Panel Questions and Answers

1. What was your experience?

- It was hard, I found myself crying in the garden and at unexpected times.
- It was an adjustment – all those things you used to do for your teenagers, taking them places, picking them up, were gone and I had all this free time.
- I'm divorced and it was just my daughter and I in the house, so when she left it was really empty.
- We definitely checked out all of her health care options and doctors in the area; especially since the college she chose had a health center that didn't offer weekend hours. We made a list of medical offices/doctors she could contact.
- I also gave her a list of mental health counselors she could call if she was having trouble.
- We skype a lot so that helps me and if I send care packages I get a call right away, so I do that once a month. Just little things so she knows I am thinking about her. Helps keep us connected.
- I made sure to tell myself that if she didn't respond right away, it was ok, it didn't mean things were going wrong. I had to remember she was probably busy.
- My kid was afraid to ask for help or ask how to do the laundry or go to the Computer Center to get help with her laptop; we really needed to talk about all the resources on campus that were available to her.
- I actually did need to work with my daughter early on about talking with adults and asking for help. Once a week in high school, we made a deal that she would ask a teacher a question after class, one-on-one, so she would feel more comfortable doing this when she went to college
- I also had that same issue with my daughter and we worked with her at a young age to get her to speak with adults and look them in the eyes with her chin up. When she was in HS, she made all of her appointments and we pushed her to be responsible for taking charge in this area. If someone called out her name for an appointment we pushed her to speak for herself. As parents we didn't automatically start talking for her. This included hair appointments, dentist appointments etc.

- I also hooked myself up with parents who had kids that had gone to college recently so I had a good idea of how they were feeling and what they were going through. I talked a lot to this group of parents to see what I was in for.
- I work in the EMU, so I actually had the opportunity to have my daughter meet a group of college students so they could give her some tips. She probably hated it at the time; but later was grateful to have this insight.
- Talking with other parents and their college-bound kids was very helpful.
- A group of moms from my daughter's high school got together to send care packages in October when they were all off to college. That day was really fun and helped me as we all dished about our experience with getting them to college and being without them. We did this several times during the first 2 year of college.

2. How did you cope with your feelings?

- I spent a lot of time with girlfriends that also had children in college. When I was struggling they were there for me with advice and friendship.
- I took up things that I hadn't done in a while. I volunteered with a group before my daughter went to college, so I had another focus when she did eventually leave for school.
- I was thankful I had a job and something to do to keep my mind occupied. But there were still some times when it was lonely.
- We had traditions at my house. One of them was making cookies every Christmas and this year, I couldn't do it with my daughter because she wasn't going to be home, so having another group of kids to do this with was so fun and kept me from being sad about not having my daughter with me.
- My husband constantly says "Isn't this great, I have you all to myself, "so I do appreciate him for his attitude and optimism about our daughter going to school and accomplishing her goals. That kind of positivity reminds me that "it is a positive thing!" no matter how hard it is on me.
- There is a lot of time to do things that I had stopped doing when I had my daughter - I tried knitting again, exercise....etc.
- Taking Yoga classes and having time for running everyday has been great and has helped my mood a lot.

- I definitely had more time with my partner and that's been good, almost like having our old relationship back before kids.
- I remind myself that it's a process. I won't be comfortable with everything that is happening in the moment it happens, but I try and remind myself that I will get there eventually.

3. Are there any things you wish you had known before hand or done differently?

- One of the things that I wish I had looked at was the socio-economic status of the students who attend my daughter's school. Many of her classmates come from incredibly wealthy families and this was something she now has to deal with. Her roommates don't have to have a job on campus to earn spending money etc.
- I had to learn about the safety protocols at the school my child attends and if there was an issue I needed to know who I could call for assistance.
- I had a hard time getting information about my child's financial aid; so finally my daughter gave me access to her portal; but because she is an adult the school doesn't give me access even though I'm paying the bills.
- I learned my daughter can download all of her textbooks and she doesn't pay for any of them.
- Moving her into a room in the middle of the city was a challenge. We had to use an Uber to get her dorm items from Target to her dorm.
- Also, because she attends school so far away from Oregon, I now make sure she hardly brings anything home from her dorm. Sometimes, we would have to buy the same things again because she forgot them when she went back or had no room to get them back on the flight. Most kids will have a storage unit or have friends/relatives that will allow them to store their dorm items until they return for the next year. Renting a storage unit seems to work.
- When you go on visits to different campuses, let your child go on the tour and then when they come back let your child give you the tour and ask them what they learned and where the resources are on campus. Make them responsible for learning where they go to get the help they need.