

## How to Launch Your "Boomerang Kidult"

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Now that Labor Day has come and gone, all the kids should be out of the house and back at school. But wait! What about your emerging adult child who is still living with you, his or her college degree neatly tucked away? Are you in the midst of a replay of the big screen comedy "Failure to Launch" and not finding it quite so funny? You're not alone.

Millions of fledgling adults, often called "kidults," have graduated from college but are not living independently of their parents. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 25% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 still lived with their parents. Young people are studying longer or marrying later, postponing adulthood until around age 30. Here's how this extended period of dependency can affect relationships.

Steve remembers how he longed for those empty-nester days once his son had moved home from college. He reflected on the irony. "The guidelines our son wanted to discuss were not the ones my wife and I had set down. He told us we were not to tie up the computer or play with his dog. He also wanted us to leave the bathroom fan off when we showered, so the noise wouldn't wake him up. We hardly got a chance to talk about what we wanted."

It's called triangulation, when your relationship as a couple has to accommodate your emerging adult child. What it often means is less privacy and spontaneity for you, and a need to establish new patterns of interaction and parenting.

As Beth realized: "We can't treat her as if she's a teenager but we also don't intend to lose sleep worrying about whether she's o.k. Unless we can agree on some reasonable curfew, this living arrangement just isn't going to work."

Jill had been a single mom since her three children were young teens. Once her last child went to college she felt free to move in with her partner. "When my middle daughter lost her job and could no longer afford to live alone, I didn't have the heart to say no to her. But with the chaos that ensued, I soon regretted my decision. As I recognized that my growing resentment was affecting all of us, I took a stand. We defined the house rules, split up the chores and set a deadline for her moving out. Now we try to openly air the issues and our feelings."

Like Jill, you can take a stand. Here are some more ideas:

1. Establish areas of accountability and appropriate boundaries. This can smooth day-to-day living; it encourages some emotional detachment and the freedom to reclaim your own lives.
2. Insist that your kidults face their own challenges. At times "tough love" is the most effective support parents can give. Jane's son chose to move back home after his divorce and expected his mother to handle his laundry, shopping and cleaning the way his wife had. She knew he had to learn to take care of himself, once again. "I insisted that we set some things straight and that he take responsibility for himself. We created a chart like the one when the kids were in grade school. I have not backed down and so far we are all still here, trying to make our complicated situation work."
3. Create a timetable for financial independence. Financial assistance comes with a price for all - with potential conflict around issues of co-dependency, control and unsolicited advice. Jack commented, "Our daughter wants to live rent free but won't listen to our advice about how to get back on her feet. Our plan is that she will be on her own within six months, and we will stick to that."
4. Commit to a concrete plan to move the family toward common goals. This requires the willingness to work as a team, with frequent discussions as well as some compromise. When you put limits and deadlines into place, the result is less conflict. According to a 2006 Money/ICR poll, 60% of Americans believe that college graduates should be allowed to move back home, but only for up to a year, and 57% state that parents should charge them rent.
5. Find the right balance between offering support to your offspring and taking care of yourselves. Sally and Garry were enjoying spending time together when the last of their children left home. These pleasures were short lived. When their daughter separated and wanted to move back, they initially felt that they couldn't turn her away. It wasn't long before their patience wore thin, and they knew they had no choice. "Our daughter got lazy. She wouldn't look for work and made little effort to help out. We eventually insisted that she find other arrangements. We felt guilty and spent a lot of time discussing our decision. But we have waited forever for this period in our lives and we don't plan to miss it."

6. Let go. Once you have done all you can to prepare your boomerang kidults to be on their own, let go of your resistance and act. Launching them is an opportunity for all of you. Tap into your own passions and begin to imagine the adventures that lie ahead.

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