

How to Supervise Adult Children Living at Home

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Are you wondering why so many adult children return home to live with their parents? You raise them, put them through school and do the best you can in preparing them to be independent productive citizens. And voila, they are back! This article is about understanding why adult children return to living with their parents and the importance of having a plan that includes goals, rules, expectations and boundaries.



The Big Question: Why?

Patrice L. Onwuka¹, from the Independent Women's forum reports that "33 percent of 25-29-year old's live at home with their parents or grandparents." This is in comparison to 12 percent in 1970. A few of the reasons are:

- High student loan debt and other financial obligations.
- A sluggish wage growth and the high cost of living.
- The median age of first-time marriages has risen and the number of young adults either married or living with an unmarried partner has fallen.
- Psychologically and interpersonally "Young Adults and their parents like each other."²
- "Over time, our kids have stopped learning to solve problems and entertain themselves because adults are quick to jump in and fix things for them."³

According to Onwuka⁴, young men with jobs are less likely to live at home but the share of employed young men has fallen from 84 percent in 1960 to 71 percent in 2014. In contrast, there has been a rise in employment and wages for young women who are still living at home. Vicki Nelson⁵ reports that "85% of college seniors expect to move back home, and a 2016 UBS survey found that 63% of millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) move home after graduation."

Helping but not hindering

We all want to keep a healthy connection with our adult children, which can be a difficult at times. The most important rule is to keep your communications open, honest and to clarify your expectations/guidelines. Make a plan that includes everyone in the house—even the dog! Talk about what your needs are and their needs while living at home. What are your and their expectations and what evidence are you looking for to know the plan is working? What do you both hope to gain from them living at home? Don't just talk about the plan, write it down and revisit it regularly.

- **Communication** – Be open, honest and respectful with your adult child and expect the same in return. Avoid giving advice as they will, most likely, view it as criticism. Remember how it felt or continues to feel when your own parents jump to giving advice! Listen to your child, acknowledge how they are feeling and ask how you might help. You may have gone through some of the same challenges that your adult child is going through, but chances are slim that they draw any parallel between your life and theirs. I, personally, find a lot of value in saying – I trust that you know what is best for you and that you will ask me for what you need. Be empathetic but don't except excuses.

- **Set limits and boundaries** – It’s not about control but giving them choices and creating motivation. They are adults—so is a curfew necessary? But, out of courtesy, expect them to let you know if they are not coming home. Agree on how to handle arguments. Agree on how they are to keep their area clean as well as common areas. What about the use of foul language in the home, having friends over and/or the use of alcohol/drugs in the home? If they smoke, have a designated place for them with the expectation of keeping that area picked up. Remember, the limits and boundaries are to help motivate and nurture a relationship that is different than when they were younger. It is about offering emotional support that helps, not stifle, them in becoming mature and responsible adults with confidence in their own skills.
- **Have a plan** - Set a time frame on when they will be moving out. Should they be paying rent? How about picking up a utility bill such as water or electricity? Should you be paying their phone bill and/or car insurance? Have a plan as to when they will take over those expenses. What about “out-of-pocket medical expenses? Have them make a budget with the end goal of meeting their objective. According to Judy Lawrence (2013), parents are supplementing their adult children’s income by as much as “\$100-\$500 a month” or in some situations “as much as 25-45% of their monthly income.” The end result is an “undermining of their children’s financial and emotional growth.”

Parenting an adult child can be difficult but, for me, the most difficult was, and continues to be letting go of worry. As a single parent of an only child she became my life—good or bad. Now, she has graduated from college, is recently married and works full time. What more could a parent want?

When I begin to worry about her, or anyone for that matter, I remind myself that my worry will not change the outcome. It might give me a brief sense of some control, but I know I have no control. I quickly direct those thoughts of worry to something more productive and know that life isn’t always easy. I have to trust in her ability and my ability to handle whatever comes our way.

We Can Help

If you are a parent of an adult child living at home, know that you are not alone. VITAL WorkLife™ counselors and consultants can help with emotional support, family communication, coping with stress, planning and much more. Your EAP can also help with financial concerns and budgeting. Contact us at **800.383.1908** to access your resources today and get the support you need!

Additional reading

Walking on Eggshells: Navigating the Delicate Relationships Between Adult Children and Parents by Jane Isay

¹ Onwuka, P.L. (2018, April 12) They’re Back! Share of Adult Children Living at Home Highest in 75 years. *Independent Women’s Forum*.

² DePaulo, B. (2016) Why Are So Many Young Adults Living with Their Parents? *Psychology Today*

³ Abraham, K. and Studaker-Cordner, M. Failure to Launch, Part 1: Why So Many Adult Kids Still Live with Their Parents. Retrieved from <https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/failure-to-launch-part-1-why-so-many-adult-kids-still-live-with-their-parents>

⁴ Onwuka, P.L. (2018, April 12) They’re Back! Share of Adult Children Living at Home Highest in 75 years. *Independent Women’s Forum*.

⁵ Nelson, V. (2017) Boomerang Kids: When Graduation Means a Move Back Home. *College Parent Central-Information for the parents of college students*.