

Emotions: Bridge the Distance

When the kids move out, you've still got work to do. And no, it's not turning their old room into a den. You still need to find ways to connect with your young adult children. Sure, you're important, but you may have a difficult time believing it when your children are no longer around.

That feeling of loss, uncertainty, and mixed memories really define the entire stage we call reflection. A lot has happened in those 18-plus years, and it will all come flooding back to you now. You'll be tying a tie in the mirror and remember when your young son "borrowed" money to buy it for Father's Day. At the lake, you'll be digging a worm out of your bait box and suddenly remember how-in this same boat-you taught your daughter laughingly, lovingly how to bait a hook.

There'll be regrets. But there will be great pride as you watch them accomplish things you never dreamed were possible. Expect apprehension as you wait to see if your values will be carried on in their own lives and families. You have to let go, and that's tough. But that doesn't mean you have to stay away.

Bridging the physical distance with your adult children will be one of your first tasks. I encourage you to be proactive and creative. Take the initiative and call them for a lunch date. Offer to help with a remodeling project. Or, if they live out-of-town, call just to say "Hi, how're you doing?" Write a letter of encouragement and support. Never underestimate the power that comes with a father's words of blessing.

Seek out new ways to connect with your adult children. Maybe you'll spend a night sleeping in a college dorm room, or go driving around looking at cars for sale.

Bridge the distance by continuing to track the events of their

lives. Your interest demonstrates your love and concern, and you'll be ready to offer any needed assistance at a moment's notice.

And, dad, your involvement may also include asking forgiveness for ways in which you let them down when they were younger. Resist the temptation to get defensive, and realize that your children need to process those issues. Best of all, such a reconciliation with your adult child can lead to a whole new relationship which can be summed up in one word: friends.

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