

How to Help Your Young Adult Build Their Own Life

You know that fatherhood doesn't end when a child turns 20, right?

We recently heard from a distraught mom. She and her husband have a son in college who lives at home, and he basically takes the approach that since he's an "adult" now, he can pretty much do what he wants. And he isn't doing much, which makes things very tense.

This son is lazy and sloppy and doesn't show any respect when his dad asks him to help out around the house. Mom and Dad don't want to upset him or make things worse, so they pretty much put up with it. This mom says she cleans up after her son because she wants her home to be orderly for the rest of the family.

These are such difficult situations because all parents want their children to be happy. But sometimes doing what's *best* for them will cause some discomfort and unhappiness, at least for a while. But bottom line, parents can't let their adult children wreck their households. When they are irresponsible and living at home, it puts strain on everyone. They should not be allowed to act like children when they need to be transitioning to adulthood. If a child in his 20s isn't forced to take on more responsibility for his own life, there's no motivation for him to become an independent, self-reliant adult who can handle the "real world."

If he's disrespecting his parents along with it, there definitely needs to be a change. He needs some motivation to step up and take on responsibility.

How does that look, exactly? Well, let me warn you: The ideas I have might sound a lot like "tough love," which can leave a

child angry and upset for a time. In some scenarios, he may leave and say he never wants to see you again, and you might not hear from him for weeks. But chances are good that eventually he'll come around, and maybe even thank you for giving him the "kick" he needed to get going.

Think about birds teaching their young to fly. Often they nudge them out of the nest. And in some cases, that's how it is with young adult kids.

So how can parents handle this? One suggestion is to draw up an agreement with your young-adult child *in writing*. The details depend on the specifics of the situation, but a good general rule comes from the authors of the *Love and Logic* books. It's called the "good neighbor policy."

If a friendly neighbor needed a place to stay for a while, you'd probably help him out. But if he wanted to stay longer, you would likely draw up an agreement. He'd need to obey your house rules and pay something for room and board—*on time, each month*. Of course, if he didn't like the rent amount or the rules, he'd be free to find another situation.

If necessary, you would take action to move him out of your home. (Read more about how this can apply to teenagers in this article.)

That might sound cruel. Maybe you could never imagine doing that to your own child. But that might be exactly what he needs to get his life on track.

Let me quickly add, while pushing, it's important to communicate in several different ways, "We love you, and we want you to learn to be responsible, independent and content." That could include encouraging words, regular invitations for home-cooked meals back home and financial help related to the transition itself. For example, you may want to help cover the security deposit on an apartment lease. Or something like a gift certificate to a men's clothing store for your son to

pick out a new interview suit.

Also, understand that even a bird doesn't do this until the young one is ready. So, not all situations call for the same approach.

But if you're in this situation, get with your wife and do some research, maybe talk with other parents, and figure out an approach you both believe in. You need to be on the same page and not let any issues with your child come between the two of you.

Surely some other parents have been through this. What advice do you have for these tough situations with young adults? Please share them in the comments below.

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