

UNITE
STUDENTS

STUDENTS LEAVING HOME

Parents' guide to empty nesting

AUTUMN 2021



INTRODUCTION: THE TRUTH ABOUT EMPTY NESTERS

Research has shown that Empty Nest Syndrome is hitting parents hard, with 98% left feeling a sense of real grief once their young person has left home to go to university for the very first time.

While this heightened sense of loss might feel overwhelming as a parent or guardian, rest assured it's very common to feel this way – especially once you consider the increased amount of time you've spent with your loved ones during the pandemic.

At Unite Students, we know those first few weeks after your child has flown the nest can be hard. As the UK's largest provider of student accommodation, we've teamed up with Dr Dominique Thompson - a GP, young people's mental health expert, TEDx speaker, author and educator - to offer help and support for anyone who's struggling to cope without their child living at home.

Just remember, you're not alone. In fact, a poll of 1,000 parents of first-time university students revealed:

20%

feel like a part of them is missing.

17%

are now questioning the future of their marriage or other relationships now their child has left home.

30%

say they're drinking alcohol more, or have started drinking.

87%

wish they'd thought about the impact of their child leaving home in advance or sought advice.

"Since Aminta moved away to university, I've experienced waves of different emotions. I have had moments when I'm thinking, 'I'm sure she's absolutely fine'... And then waves of what can only be described as grief hit me. I'm really not exaggerating when I say it feels like grief."

Susan from Leeds, whose daughter Aminta recently moved to London to begin studying at King's College.



EXPERT TOP TIPS: COMING TO TERMS WITH AN EMPTY NEST



It's natural for parents and guardians to feel at a loss when their young person leaves home for the first time. Here, Dr Dominique Thompson provides ten top tips for those dealing with Empty Nest Syndrome:



1 Find a new purpose: Having a new reason to get up every day is vital for wellbeing and provides structure and meaning. Why not help a neighbour, try volunteering, or even get a pet or plant to nurture?



2 Establish new routines: Loss of routine and daily structure can throw you. Establish routines that makes you feel good. A peaceful morning coffee or evening walk will help ground you and reduce anxiety.



3 Address sensory loss: You may miss their voice, their smell, and even their movement around the home. Photos can remind you of happy times, while a bottle of their scent or aftershave can trigger sensory memories. It's normal to miss their presence, so wean yourself off gradually.



4 Address other issues: Rather than making life-changing decisions in throes of empty nest sadness, use time to sort things out. Talk to people you trust, take time to ponder options and decide when you're ready.



5 Give it time: If the loss of their presence feels like a bereavement, remember it takes time to adjust and recover. However, as with grief, it happens in small steps, and you might need support to get there.



6 Focus on you: Take time to address health issues, tackle weight loss, increase fitness, investigate a hobby, or learn something new.



7 Avoid loneliness: Actively plan to spend time with your family, friends or partner. Make sure you see or speak to someone every day if you need companionship.



8 Stay in touch: Pre-arrange how often you'll speak to your child, and plan when you'll see them next. For anything in-between, set up a WhatsApp group for pictures and banter.



9 Don't make them feel guilty: Instead, let them know they're missed. Send a picture of their empty room with a joke about how tidy it is, rather than a crying face emoji! They'll know that you miss them but want to feel reassured that you're coping.



10 Ask for help: If you're still struggling after four to six weeks, try not to overburden your child with worries. Talk to your support network and ask your GP for help. You're not alone - help is out there.

About Dr Dominique Thompson

Dr Dominique Thompson has over 20 years of clinical experience caring for students, most recently as Director of Service at the University of Bristol Students' Health Service. She is also a clinical advisor.

Further resources and support:

Websites

- growingagrownup.com
- studentminds.org.uk/supportforparents.html
- theuniguide.co.uk/advice/advice-for-parents
- savethestudent.org/student-finance/parents-guide-tips-university.html

Books

- *'How to Grow a Grown Up'* by Dominique Thompson and Fabienne Vailes
- *'The Empty Nest: Your Changing Family, Your New Direction'* by Celia Dodd

Communities of support

- For single parents – Gingerbread – gingerbread.org.uk/community/online-forum/topic/empty-nest-cant-stop-crying/
- For all parents and carers – Facebook – The [Growing a Grown Up](#) private community created by Dr Dominique Thompson

UNITE STUDENTS: WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK

For 30 years, we've watched thousands of parents and guardians wave goodbye to their students at the start of a new academic year. During this time, we've learned a thing or two about providing you with the reassurance you need.

If your student has flown the nest this year, it's normal to have lots of questions and concerns. That's why Unite Students is here to provide you with reassurance and support that you – and your child – need at this time of transition.

1. We're keeping your student's home safe

Our properties are only accessible with a secure fob or card system, and every student room has its own individual lock. We have CCTV in every property and an overnight team in each city, who can respond to incidents.

2. You can contact us 24/7

We have an Emergency Control Centre which is open 24 hours a day 365 days a year - please ring

0300 303 1611

We'll always follow up on any concerns raised.

3. We'll support your student through their studies

We'll be there when they need us. Each city has several welfare leads who are trained listeners and can signpost students to sources of support. Resident Ambassadors are also there to help students to settle in and meet friends.

4. You can help your student adjust to university life

Leaving home is a big milestone, so we understand if you want to help your student to adapt accordingly. Our [Leapskills programme](#) helps you to do just that. It sheds light on what student life is really like, encouraging students to not only have open conversations with loved ones but also develop skills that will make independent living a more positive experience.

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