

Life Transitions: The Launching Years

By Suzan Myhre, MSSW

There are many transitional times in the life cycle of a family. One of the most momentous is the transition of launching an adolescent from home into college, tech school or full time employment. One of the key features of any transition is loss. Transitional changes always involve loss. Going from one reality and one set of expectations to another. This is true of growth in general. This is why so many of us resist change. Change requires adapting to something new, and the “something” is typically an unknown. Thus, the resistance.

The change of launching a teenage child into the world is one of those “unknowns”. Child psychologist Jean Piaget used the term “dis-equilibrium” to describe the lack of stability individuals experience moving from one developmental stage to the next. This off balance period is complicated by a set of demands from colleges and other institutions that require intensive time and attention to the filling out of applications. The college bound are entering a time that is often seen as extended adolescence, when they are actively exploring their world while still being connected to home. Jeffrey Arnett calls this “emerging adulthood”.

Young men and women during this phase often look to their parents for guidance, support and economic help. The degree to which they ask and the degree to which they are helped is often dependent on the delicate balance between support and autonomy parents must make. Parents often have to allow their young adult to struggle to find their answers, and to help them grow. This can be one of the greatest transitions a parent makes when launching their young adult. One struggle parents face is to remember that allowing their son or daughter to struggle is not an act of neglect or cold-heartedness. Indeed, struggle is a fact of life. One must tolerate pain for growth. Another struggle is that while parents are “letting go” of their son/daughter, they are in fact remaining in a “connected” state in relationship to their son/daughter. The connection that is fostered and the attachment is a new one. It is one that promotes and recognizes their son/daughter’s competencies, and ability to live independent of the parent. This new connection is one based on less control and more on consultation and mutually agreed on ways of staying close.

Of course, all of this is easy to write about, but in application it has its “growing pains”. The growing pains are experienced by all, because all are asked to see and expect new things of this wonderful individual. All are saying goodbye to the daily presence of this family member, and hello to a new connection. It is sad and joyous. It is full of memories and tears. It is full of hopes and dreams. It has times of failure and disappointment and times of great growth and self-discovery. It is something we as parents accomplished, and we watch our children accomplish. Good-bye’s can be good.

If you or a dear friend are experiencing this transition, please be gentle with yourselves. Grief through this time is tender and precious to the Lord. Invite Him into it with you.

“He will quiet you with His love” Zephaniah 3:17

Some of the above information was taken from the book *The Launching Years: Strategies for parenting from senior year to college life* by Laura S. Kastner, Ph.D. and Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D.

*Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.
P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920*

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.