

## Launching Adolescents: A Family Affair

By Suzan Myhre, MSSW

Have you witnessed the launching of a spacecraft? The launching of Japan's first solar-powered spacecraft took place on May 20, 2010. The first spacecraft launch I can remember was on our black and white television on 52<sup>nd</sup> street in Milwaukee. It was Apollo 11, and my family marveled at Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon. We could not imagine that such a thing was possible. Of course, there were years of preparation and fine-tuning that went into that launch. Several previous attempts were dangerously costly to the men and women who risked their lives in the hope of getting a spaceship to the moon.

Sometimes, even with years of preparation and hard work, adolescents are still not ready to launch from home into the world. I found a great description of what launching requires on a goggle website, "Ask a Scientist". The description follows:

*Gravity pulls on any object near the earth, including you and a spaceship. To get off the ground, you have to push yourself up harder than the earth is pulling you down. When you jump in the air, you are pushing against the ground. When a bird flies, it is pushing against the air with its wings. A spaceship (or rocket) pushes against its exhaust—the stuff that comes out of the back. Just as if you were sitting on a swing and threw a baseball forward, you would move backwards. The harder you throw, the more you will move.*

Adolescents and families experience many pressures that make it hard to "push up harder" than the forces that are pulling them down.

- Adolescents who feel deeply insecure, and are afraid of failure, may be afraid to take a step to move ahead. Many times these are the "brightest and best" students in school—those that volunteer and participate in everything.
- Adolescents who struggle in social situations, or in making new friendships, may feel intimidated by the prospect of leaving home.
- If the parents are in financial stress or are having marital troubles such as bickering or avoiding each other, an adolescent will pick up on this stress and try to alleviate it in any way he or she can. This may mean the adolescent chooses not to leave the nest, even when all prospects seem good.
- If the parents are believing the worst about their son or daughter, or have deep seeded "secret" fears about what will happen when their child leaves home, the adolescent may be responding to those "vibes" and choose not to leave.
- And of course, there are issues of maturity and brain development that sometimes make it very difficult for the adolescent to leave home.

Sometimes issues of health arise and make it impossible to launch the adolescent when it seems the “timely” thing to do.

When struggles like these arise, it is easy for all parties involved to feel like they are failing in some way. It is easy to do the “shame and blame game,” in which everyone tries to pin the blame for what has happened on someone. Of course, there is never one person solely responsible, and there is rarely a simple answer to why things are playing out the way they are. Life is hard. Winston Churchill is quoted as saying “When you’re going through hell, keep going”. Focusing on disappointment and trouble will only stop you dead in your tracks.

Ask for help. Talk to your trusted friends. Get some professional help as you navigate your way through ‘deep space’. The scientists of the space shuttle worked together whenever a roadblock presented itself. And though they had a timetable in their own minds, they knew that it didn’t always work out that way. Be assured that God has a purpose and a plan for you and your child. He will use the struggle to strengthen you.

A good resource for launching readiness comes from the book *The Launching Years* by Laura S. Kastner, Ph.D. and Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D.

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