

# Mother's guide to coping with empty nest syndrome



on the couch

my children my central focus. Now that our youngest has left for college, I feel it is time for us.

The problem is that my husband Joe seems distant and unresponsive to my efforts to create a closer connection. Every day I tell him that I love him but he does not say he loves me. I find that I am getting insecure and anxious. I have tried to talk to him but he avoids the conversation. What can I do?

**QUESTION:**

My husband and I have been married for 30 years and despite some difficulties, we have managed to hold things together. I have been at home for most of those years making

**Answer:**

It sounds like you are living a version of the empty nest syndrome, shifting your focus from you children to Joe and he is getting nervous. There are many transition challenges that families face over the years

and dealing with life without our children is one of them. Change is rarely simple and the empty nest leaves a void that women often feel more deeply than men, simply because generally, even today, mothers spend more time and energy on their children than do fathers. I suspect that Joe feels that with the children gone, he is your next project.

I am wondering what you are doing with your energy other than focusing on your marriage? Often, following the launch of the children, mothers lose their sense of purpose and identity. So much of them has gone into the development of others that they no longer know who they are. Bored, lonely and sometimes de-

pressed, they are like a fish out of water, flopping around and wondering what to do with themselves. There is a saying that being a mother is like being an elevator operator. You're always delivering someone to their next floor, but you never get to get off.

Maybe it's time to make you your next project. Asking yourself what that would involve is a good place to start. What parts of you have you left underdeveloped in your rush to get others off the ground? Are there interests that you wanted to explore but didn't have the energy for? Are there friendships or family relationships that you wanted to strengthen but didn't have the time for?

Over the years I've spoken

with many women in transition following the launch of their children.

Without exception those who did best were the women who got interested in their own development. One client who loved art took several art history courses and went to Italy on a summer art tour. Another joined a running group and trained for a half marathon. These were just the beginning initiatives in their efforts to take responsibility for their own happiness. They found that their efforts benefitted not only themselves, but their relationships with both their husbands and their children.

There is a lovely phrase in the novel A Passage to India where E.M. Forster describes

the misfortune of, "living life at half pressure." I think of it as a life held down by a myopic vision of what is possible. Like a partially inflated balloon, it cannot lift off and soar.

We have to inflate our own balloons in life. I suggest that you get at it quickly and before you know it, Joe will be wondering why you are less available and the kids will be home from college wondering what's for dinner.

*Margaret Ann Speak, M.A., C.C.C. works with couples, individuals, and families from a Bowen Family Systems perspective at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.*

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Trailpeak.com allows members to introduce their trail observations and comments for other members to use. Social networking is the plan for Trailpeak with new online tools being developed all the time. This summer, Trailpeak has six SPOT team members across Canada, equipped with "Find Me Spot" satellite messenger units, hiking, biking, climbing, and paddling it up. Individuals are encouraged to check out the site for a chance to win a complete SPOT personal satellite tracker package.



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