**EMPTY NEST SYNDROME- “*A feeling of grief or loneliness parents may feel when their children leave home”.***

This is a notoriously difficult time of year for parents whose children are about to head off on gap years or to university. The truth is, if you have done a good job, it’s natural that your child will fly from the nest and after having spent at least eighteen years as a parent, it is only reasonable to expect that this change may prove difficult for you. Welcome to the world of Empty Nest Syndrome.

Empty Nest Syndrome refers to the deep feelings of sadness, loneliness, and loss that parents often experience when their children leave home, typically to pursue higher education or start their careers. This transition can be overwhelming, but it's essential to remember that it also marks a new chapter in your life—one filled with opportunities for personal growth and rediscovery.

Here are some strategies for coping with Empty Nest Syndrome:

**Acknowledge Your Feelings**: The first step is to recognize and accept your emotions. It's entirely normal to feel a sense of loss and sadness when your children leave. Allow yourself to grieve, but don't let it consume you. You may wonder what your role in life is and how you view yourself. Don’t make big moves yet. Give yourself time to adjust rather than suddenly selling the house or moving. It takes time to fully adjust to the changes you may experience.

**Stay Connected:** Just because your children have left home it doesn't mean that you can't maintain a strong connection with them. Modern technology makes it easier than ever to stay in touch through phone calls video chat and social media but don’t overdo it. Ask them how often they'd like to keep in touch. Allowing them to guide the frequency of phone calls gives them a sense of control.

**Keep an open-door policy:** Moving away from home can be exciting yet frightening experience for many teenagers. Your teenagers may be doing a lot of growing up, but they'll need reassurance that you're always there for them. They think they know it all - but they'll soon find they don't. An open-door policy where they know they can ring you any time of the night or day when in need gives them confidence.

**Treat your Teenagers as Adults:** Although you may feel like your teenagers are not able to look after themselves don’t sabotage the efforts, they are making to become independent. You may yearn the time when they depended on you, and that might lead you to sabotage strides they're making.   Remember the best lessons we learn are from the mistakes we make so show an interest in what they are doing but resist criticising them for not doing things as you would. Hopefully by supporting their efforts they will share the important things that are happening in their life.

**Invest In Yourself:** Do something for yourself.  Make a list of at least three things you haven't done or have given up because parenting has sapped your energy. Maybe it’s writing, joining a community group, or learning a new language. Maybe it’s finding a new career or going back to school. You are never too old to learn. Don’t pick something that will take many years to complete, but something that interests you.  Keeping busy or taking on new challenges at work or at home can help ease the sense of loss you may be experiencing.

**Cultivate New Relationships:** strengthen your existing relationships and seek opportunities to create new ones join clubs or organisations aligned with your interests or volunteer for a cause you're passionate about expanding your social circle can help combat loneliness.

**Rekindle your relationship with your partner:** Many couples are shocked to find that when their personal lives no longer revolve around children, cracks appear in their relationship. Don't panic. This is completely natural. Stay positive. Focus on the positive aspects of having an empty nest such as the opportunity to deepen your relationship with your partner or spouse and embrace the chance truly discover each other and enjoy activities together. Talk to your partner about how you feel and discuss your thoughts and hopes for your future. Talking together about the extra time and energy you might have to devote to your relationships or personal interests after your last child leaves home might help you adapt to this major life change. This maybe the first opportunity in years that you will have had to plan activities together without having to consider your teenager.

**Dads Matter Too:** These problems used to belong almost exclusively to women but nowadays both men and women may suffer from empty nest as men are far more involved in the lives of their children.

**Accept both the good days and the bad days.** During the first few months of Empty Nest Syndrome, you may be surprised by your fluctuating moods.  This is inevitable, as some days you'll be preoccupied with how your teenager is managing without you whilst on others, you'll quite happily get on with your life. Learn to roll with these changing moods and don't hide the bad days from your partner or friends.

**Seek support:** If you're having a difficult time dealing with an Empty Nest, lean on loved ones and close contacts for support. Share your feelings if you are feeling depressed with a counsellor or doctor.

Talk to other empty nesters. Look to someone who went through it recently or check out the internet for online support groups of Empty-Nesters.

**Remember:** Empty Nest Syndrome is a natural part of the parenting journey, but it doesn't have to define this phase of your life. By knowledge in your feelings staying connected with your teenagers and embracing the opportunities that come with an empty nest you can navigate this transition and find fulfilment in your newfound independence. Remember it's not an end but a new beginning in your journey as a parent.