



Coping with Change – Living with Adult Children

We expect to raise our children and send them on their way when they reach adulthood. Various situations—including the COVID-19 pandemic—can interfere with our expectations, not to mention our children’s plans for their future.

Early in the pandemic, adult children moving home seemed like a temporary solution to job losses or campus closures.¹ For many families, this has turned into a more permanent state and in some instances has created a number of stressors.

With the stress of the pandemic and unknown futures, issues about cleaning or who’s making dinner can be a tipping point. While there may be some difficult conversations and negotiations, having your adult children move home can have rewarding benefits.

Negotiating tough conversations

Finances.

Depending on the situation, if for example you or your partner have lost employment, charging your child rent

may be necessary. While it’s ideal if your child offers, you may need to table the suggestion. If they hesitate at the idea, show them your monthly budget to make the situation clear.² Options could include:

- A flat rate contributing to your mortgage/rent, food, utilities, etc.,
- Contribution to help cover the costs of food, utilities, etc.,
- A percentage based on their income,
- No rent, but an expectation that they’ll help with household chores or projects.

If you’re able to cover the costs of having your child at home, discuss having them contribute to a savings or investment account to save for their future (e.g., car, rent, house down payment), rather than frivolous spending.

If your child has student debt, encourage them to pay off loans and save where possible. Have open and respectful conversations if issues arise (e.g., your child is spending all their money on clothes, car, electronics).³

Household chores/responsibilities.

Be specific and clear when planning the share of household chores, your expectations and their responsibilities. If your child slips into old habits from their adolescence, try to stay calm. No matter how old your child is, they can still be sensitive to your anger. Use clear statements about how you feel and why their behaviour is problematic.

Be flexible and remember that their schedule may not be in sync with yours (they stay up late studying and rise at noon; while you head to bed at 10pm and rise at 6am). Explain what you expect. Try to use “I” statements and be willing to listen to your child’s responses.⁴

- “I expect that when you make lunch for yourself, that you’ll clean up. When you make a mess and expect me to clean it up, I feel like you don’t appreciate being here.”
- “I wake up when you’re preparing a snack at midnight. Can we work out a plan? I’m not getting enough sleep.”

Keep in mind that these considerations go both ways—your child likely doesn’t appreciate your early morning rituals or running the vacuum cleaner at 9am. Compromise is key.

If you do end up having an argument:

- Take a deep breath and try again.
- Take some time away to cool off. Communicate that you need a moment—otherwise they may think you’re walking away from them.
- Acknowledge your part in the argument and that “Everyone’s in a difficult situation and we all need to make an effort to make this work.”



You may need their support caring for younger children or your parents. Through open dialogue, create a schedule that works for everyone. Tell them that you value them and appreciate all that they’re doing to help through this difficult time. Let them know you understand how challenging the situation is for them too.

Don’t take their contributions for granted—as much as you’re making sacrifices, they are too: your child was once independent, making their own decisions and living life on their own terms—moving home likely wasn’t in their plan. While it can be easy to fall back into old family roles, avoid treating your child like a child. However, this doesn’t mean they can do whatever they want or take advantage of you.

Workspace and internet.

With more people working from home or attending school online, finding a quiet space to work can be challenging, as is internet bandwidth. If possible, avoid overlapping meeting times to avoid connectivity issues and consider upping your bandwidth if that’s an option.⁵ Put limits on video streaming (i.e., no watching YouTube, Netflix, Prime, etc.) or downloading large files during work or school hours. If possible, create one or more “quiet work zones,” such as an ergonomic workstation, a quiet nook for reading or the dining table for spreading out. Encourage everyone to use these areas for breaks from working in their room.



Watch out for everyone's mental health

The pandemic has affected many people's mental health. Your child's life plan has temporarily gone off course. They're isolated from their peers. The transition to online learning was difficult for some.⁶ If you're concerned about their mental health (or another family member), check in, offer support by asking what's going on or if there's anything you can do to support them. Seek professional help if your child or other family member seems depressed or are expressing suicidal ideations.

Focus on the positives!

Try looking at the positive outcomes of having your child move back home. Not everyone has the opportunity to live with their adult child. Look at this as a chance to develop your relationship as adults. Spend time together sharing common interests, activities or projects. This too shall pass, and you will inevitably miss them when they're gone once again.

References:

- ¹ Breen, K. (July 20, 2020) How to mentally cope if you're living with your parents again during the pandemic. Retrieved on June 3, 2020 from <https://www.today.com/tmrw/how-handle-tension-between-parents-adult-children-home-t187014>
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- ³ Four house rules for your adult child. RBC Wealth Management. Retrieved on June 3, 2021 from <https://www.rbcwealthmanagement.com/us/en/research-insights/four-house-rules-for-your-adult-child/detail/>
- ⁴ Pincus, D. Adult children living at home? How to manage without going crazy. <https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/adult-children-living-at-home-how-to-manage-without-going-crazy/>
- ⁵ Gruman, G. (2020, September 24). How to set up a WFH 'office' for the longer term. Retrieved on June 4, 2021 from <https://www.computerworld.com/article/3545478/how-to-set-up-a-work-from-home-office-for-the-long-term.html>
- ⁶ Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic: examining gender differences in stress and mental health among university students. Retrieved on June 7, 2021 from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2021.650759/full> Your Child's Transition from Pre-Teen to Adolescence