

WILL THEY EVER FLY THE NEST?

What parents say about living with young adults



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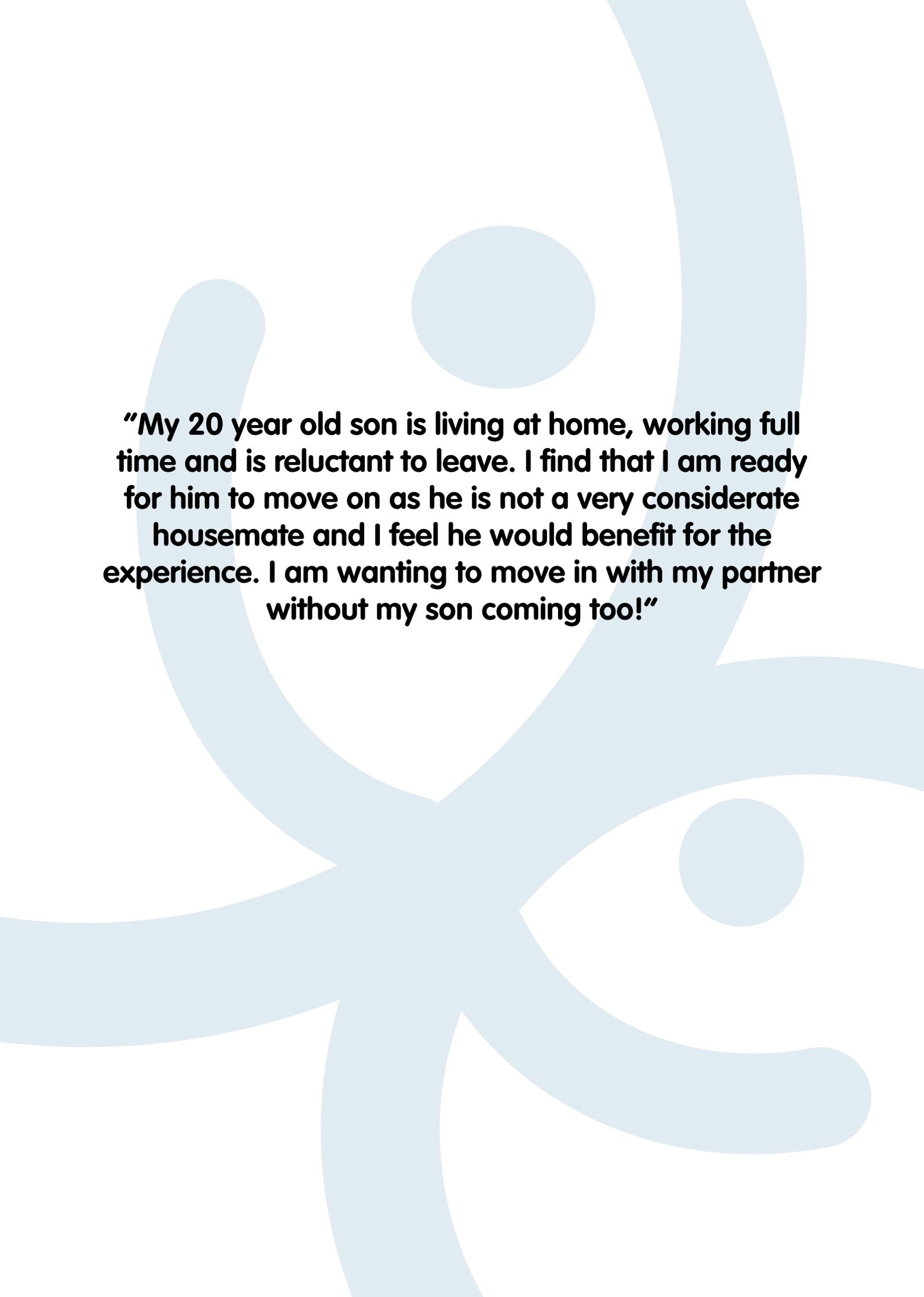


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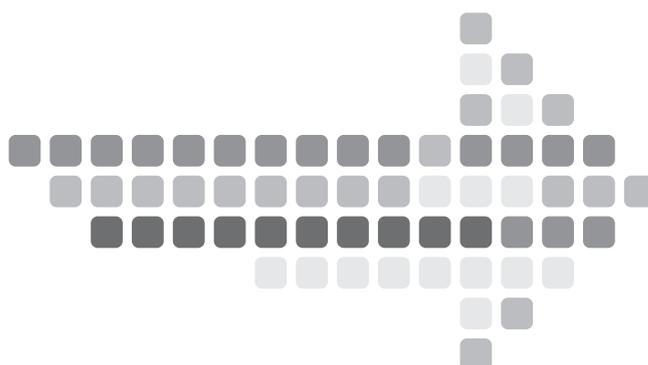
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“My 20 year old son is living at home, working full time and is reluctant to leave. I find that I am ready for him to move on as he is not a very considerate housemate and I feel he would benefit for the experience. I am wanting to move in with my partner without my son coming too!”

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1. Introduction

Parenting strategies seem to end with adulthood, as though once children become adults, parents are off the hook. It is as if by reaching the legal age of adulthood, young people magically become trouble-free and responsible. Therefore they do not need to turn to their parents for help and parents themselves can stop worrying.

Yet for today's young people, the road to adulthood and self sufficiency is a long one. As recently as 1970, for example, the typical 21-year old had already married or would be about to get married, would be caring for a new-born child, or would be expecting one. The rise in ages for entering marriage and parenthood, the extension of higher education, and prolonged job instability reflect a new period of life, lasting from the late teens through to the mid to late twenties. Moreover ONS figures show that in 2006, 58% of men and 39% of women aged 20-24 in England lived with their parents. This is significantly higher for both men and women than in 1991.¹

Research by Parentline Plus shows how this extended journey is impacting on parents and the family as more and more young people choose, or have to stay, at home. Living with young adults is as perplexing and concerning as any other stage in a parent's journey. The essential contradiction of wishing their child would leave home for their own good – whether it be going to university or sharing a flat with their peers – and grieving when they do, demonstrates that it is another complex, and a pivotal, transition for families.

“Not sure what my role is with my son now. I as a mother feel very insecure at this point. This is a transition and difficult for me as a parent to adjust to this new relationship.”

It is now generally acknowledged by policy makers that parents of teenagers need more help and support, but what help is there for parents of older young people whose children are still at home? At Parentline Plus, we believe this is a transition in family life that is ignored or misunderstood. The media paints a picture of young people being lazy and living at home because they do not want to work, or highlight the fact that high living costs mean young people choose colleges close to home – but where can parents go for information, advice and support on how to help their children and how to reconcile tensions in the family?

To find out more about what it is like for parents living with 'grown up' children, we have undertaken a series of consultations with parents, reviewed the issues parents of young adults call Parentline about, and carried out a literature review.

“My 20 year old son is having problems with his finances. He is in debt to several thousand pounds. When I speak to him he always lies about his position. His mother and I have been divorced for the past 8 years. We have always maintained contact and dealing with the kids. My son's latest incident involved him stealing his sister's birthday card and the enclosed cheque. He denied it”.

Web Question&Answer

2. Key findings from research and consultations with parents

- Parents felt that in many cases they could not see their children leaving home until their late 20's.
- The vast majority of parents talk about wanting their adult children to fly the nest, to get a good job and to flourish.
- The clash of two different lifestyles was the main bone of contention.
- Parents seem to seesaw between getting frustrated that their children are still at home whilst also feeling at least they know their children are happy and safe.
- Parents felt that family got on better when their children were in work.
- The majority of parents thought their children enjoyed living at home.
- When young people returned after college or university, there were more issues because it felt like they had a taste of freedom and so were more likely to treat home 'like a hotel'.
- Trying to get their children to look for work – either instead of college or after they have graduated – is a major preoccupation.
- Callers to Parentline were very concerned about the aggressive behaviour, both verbal and physical, of their children.
- Parents across the research worried about their children's alcohol and drug taking.

"In the beginning things were very strained, we all made mistakes and we were not communicating effectively. My husband and I realised that we had to reset boundaries just as we did when he was a small child. This was difficult at first as there was a lot of rebellion, I'm talking a years worth!"

Web survey 2007



3. Policy context

The government is making young people a major priority – focusing on getting them on the education ladder or entry into the workforce via signed up new apprenticeships and training. The objective is to reduce the number of young adults who are not in employment, education or training – referred to as NEETs.

Secretary for State Ed Balls said in a speech in November 2007:

“By 2015 every young person will be in some form of education or training until the age of 18 and there will be a range of free training beyond that. But let’s be absolutely clear, this is not about forcing young people who want to work while they train to stay at school. There will be a range of exciting qualifications and options to go into, including new Diplomas and 90,000 more apprenticeship places. Those who want to leave school to begin working at 16 will still be able to do so, as long as they participate in part-time training.”²

“Independently verified research estimates the economic benefits of raising the participation age to be around £2.4bn per year group over the course of their lifetime. This is because staying on longer improves the skills and employability of young people and raises their earning potential. There are clear benefits of higher skill levels to the economy and to society.”³

Government has also pledged to encourage universities and other higher education institutions to forge closer, longer lasting relationships with schools to increase participation. John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, highlighted the government’s motivation to enable more young people to aspire to graduate in a letter to all universities in January 2008:

“I believe the opportunities of higher education should be open to all and I am confident that by increasing the number of students in higher education we will deliver a highly skilled workforce and world class research to ensure an economically competitive UK fit for the 21st century.”⁴

What is significant is that these plans and objectives omit and disregard the role of parents. Not only do parents remain the key influence on their child’s aspirations even when they reach adulthood, but they also are increasingly taking on an unforeseen financial burden as their grown up children continue to be reliant on them for care and somewhere to live. This is especially the case when they are taking up further training or going into higher education. It is worth noticing here that this is not a recent, or UK only, trend – the latest evidence⁵ demonstrates that this trend has tended to rise over the past 10-20 years in most European countries.⁶

4. What research tells us

In July 2001, a British study commissioned by Abbey National showed that since the late 1950s, the proportion of young adults who return home after initially fleeing the nest has nearly doubled, from 25% to 46% in 2001.⁷ Another British survey commissioned by BTopenworld in 2002 claimed that 27% of first-time home leavers return home at least once, and that one in ten newly independent young adults move out and are back again (up to four times) before they leave for good.⁸ Many of these young adults leave home to 'seek independence' or for reasons related to employment or education, rather than for a relationship, a finding that was replicated in another large scale British study, known as the National Child Development Study.⁹

Research consistently demonstrates that leaving home is a key transition point for a family entailing a process of separation which is then skewed when young adults return to the family home. It is interesting that amongst young people themselves, this is seen as an acceptable life choice and that the stigma associated with living at home has been dramatically reduced.¹⁰ All this points to the rise in the homebound young adults signifying not only the changing transition to adulthood, but also a fundamental shift in how parents and adult children view their roles within the family.

Prior to the mid to late 1990s, having an adult child back at home was not generally perceived as a desirable living arrangement in Western societies. This is because it was assumed to violate parental (and Western cultural) expectations for independence and autonomy. However, with changing times, parental roles have shifted and some point the finger at the older generation (the parents), for encouraging and making it easy for their children to stay at home for longer and enabling their 'bouncing back and forth' from the parental home.

Whereas previous generations emphasised educational and financial independence, contemporary parents are the first generation for whom their children's emotional fulfilment is a primary goal. As a result, some suggest that there is more of a tendency to hyperinvest in children and one manifestation of this is the reluctance of some parents to want to empty the nest during midlife. As a result some authors speculate that permaparenting stems from the indulgence of an immature and spoiled generation which has found a perfect combination in economic and social restrictions to delay adulthood deliberately.¹¹

4.1 Staying at home – the influencing factors

There are a number of factors that influence a young adult's circumstances and choices:

- The marked growth in the numbers of young adults entering higher education in Western societies, and thus delaying their entry to the labour market means that young adults can hardly achieve financial independence.¹² There are almost three times as many further education students in the UK in 2004/05 as in 1970/1.
- Rising tuition costs and the growth of non-residential colleges have made it more attractive for students to stay at home. Other financial influences include the high cost of living, a desire to save money and expensive housing.
- Debt influences the return to the family home with latest estimates showing that the first year university class of 2007 will owe between 15 and 20 thousand pounds on average, by the time they leave.¹³
- Family factors play their role. Research shows that those living in a lone parent family, or a stepfamily, or where there are several siblings, are more likely to leave home earlier¹⁴, whilst adult children who get along better with their parents are more likely to stay¹⁵, after controlling for other factors. In particular, emotional closeness to parents (especially to mothers) predicts the possibility of young adults staying.
- Social capital in the form of close, supportive family bonds can make the family home a very comfortable 'feathered nest' and decrease the probability of early leaving.¹⁶
- Race, ethnicity, cultural and geographical factors are found to significantly affect the timing and routes out of the parental household. Ethnicity often implies both restricted access to opportunities and some particular norms and preferences.¹⁷ Cultural backgrounds are the most likely to report leaving home to 'seek independence', while Chinese young adults commonly leave for educational pursuits. Geographical variations in home leaving are also found within European countries, often due to the availability of jobs, accessibility to post-secondary institutions, and the cost of housing.¹⁸
- Age, gender and marital status figures show that if you are male, in your mid twenties and not in a relationship you are more likely to be living at home. However, couples also opt to stay at home to save money with which to kickstart their lives together.

4.2 The empty nest syndrome

One pervasive belief is that middle and older-aged parents, particularly 'stay-at-home' mothers, suffer severe emotional crises when all their children grow up and leave home.¹⁹ Commonly dubbed the 'empty nest syndrome', many theorise that during middle-age and the transition to old age, individuals experience loss events. These loss events include the loss of work, the departure of children, the death of a partner and the loss of autonomy.

Middle generation parents may also be facing their own age-related issues, such as menopause or having to provide care for their elderly parents. On one level, the empty nest syndrome makes sense, since the roles people occupy provide meaning and behavioural guidance in their lives. And since most women, in particular, have devoted a significant portion of their lives to raising children, one might expect women to suffer when their children leave because an important part of their identity and motherhood role has gone.

Yet according to many researchers, such explanation assumes that being a parent is the individual's only pertinent social role; that when children are gone, they are gone for good, and that when children leave, parenting abruptly stops.²⁰ In reality, and contrary to popular belief, research on the 'empty nest syndrome' finds that, for most parents, the departure of children is a positive experience.

Parents can find freedom, relief from responsibilities, and time for themselves. For example, sociologist Lillian Rubin²¹ found that the stereotype of the painful empty nest is largely a myth. The mothers interviewed in her sample, experienced feelings of accomplishment, that they had done their 'job' well and were ready to move on to the next stage. Moreover, many reported guilt about their feelings of happiness. Such guilt illustrates the pervasiveness of gender-based expectations in parenting and the stereotype that women are supposed to be unhappy when their children leave. However, Rubin noticed some class differences in the way mothers respond to their children leaving home.

4.3 The financial strain

A survey for the BBC2's Money programme found that debts and high property prices often force offspring to be a source of financial drain on their parents. The study suggests that one in seven parents with adult children have re-mortgaged or taken out a loan in an attempt to help. Moreover, the report suggests that this drain on finances has spawned the term 'kippers' standing for 'kids in parents' pockets, eroding retirement savings.' These parents in particular, felt they could not continue sponsoring their children for ever, and instead wanted their offspring to leave.²²

However it is important to acknowledge that most parents who are economically poor, nevertheless provide their children with support. A detailed study of young people in an area of multiple deprivation²³ indicated that most young people, including some teenage parents benefited from financial subsidy and emotional support from their parents. Students living away also received regular financial support from their families for essentials, such as rent, fuel, and food, stretching the parental budget even further.²⁴

4.4 Is there a negative impact on young adults?

Research highlights that living at home can have a negative influence on a young person's wellbeing and self-esteem. This includes:

- Lack of Independence. From the perspective of young adults living at home, lack of privacy and lack of independence, as well as occasional value clashes, are negative drawbacks.
- Conflict and stress, parental rules and regulations, feelings of dependency and having to subject themselves to the parental dictum have also been included among the negative factors listed by young adults and associated with staying with the parents.²⁵
- Impact on social confidence – showed that they are less involved in student social life and university activities and experience more difficulty making friends than students who live away from home.²⁶
- Financial disadvantages.

5. What parents tell us

5.1 Parentline data

“Mother calling very distressed about her 19 year old daughter who is being verbally and sometimes physically abusive towards her. Caller desperately wants her daughter out of the family home but she is refusing to leave. Has had involvement with the police in the past, and understands that it is an option to re-contact police should she feel threatened.”

Caller logsheet 2007

We looked in detail at 575 data sheets where parents had talked about children aged 18 or over. In keeping with the majority of calls to Parentline, callers are showing high levels of stress and anxiety often presenting with very difficult situations. There was minimum difference in the gender of the young adult causing concerns and also little difference too between calls from lone parents (40.7%) and nuclear families (39%).

The following diagram demonstrates the severity of the problems raised and indicates the challenges faced by parents when things begin to go wrong with their adult children. The findings also indicate how difficult it is for them to find help for their children and for themselves.

Category	Total Number	%
Alcohol	78	5.7%
Asbos	1	0.1%
Bad Crowd	110	8.1%
Drugs	130	9.5%
Internet Misuse	18	1.3%
Lying	114	8.4%
Physical Aggression	153	11.2%
Runaway	28	2.1%
Smoking	63	4.6%
Staying away from home	103	7.6%
Stealing	92	6.7%
Threatening/wanting to leave home	77	5.6%
Verbal Aggression	365	26.8%
Youth Justice	32	2.3%

“One caller was very upset by the behaviour of her 19 year old daughter. She has twin girls aged 19 yrs. One of the girls is fine but the other has been behaving badly and causing problems for everyone not least herself. Daughter has been using drink and drugs, ‘cocaine’, she is involved in the court system and probation service for criminal damage and she recently announced she was ‘gay’ and seemed annoyed at the lack of reaction to her coming out. Caller’s other daughter is OK although she has recently split from boyfriend and is planning on going to Australia by herself next year. She sees this as a way of putting some distance between herself and her sister.

**Both girls would like a better relationship with their Dad, but he tends to turn up when there are problems. He did visit his daughter in prison and she let rip at him reducing him to tears. Caller was concerned at her daughters attitude when she came out of prison, she thought the shock might help her daughter change her ways, but actually she said “it was like a holiday camp and she liked it.”
Caller logsheet 2007**

**“One caller rang about her 20 year old violent daughter who has attacked her on numerous occasions, breaking her bones etc. The police have been involved and issued an ASBO against her however the caller wants the ASBO changed as it prevents her daughter from come to her house. Despite her violence the caller doesn’t want her prevented from calling at her house, particularly so close to Christmas. Caller is feeling guilty and concerned.”
Caller logsheet 2007**

Those calling Parentline were often concerned about the levels of drink and drug taking of their stay at home young adults. 68% of callers worried about regular drinking but a third of these calls were about binge drinking. Over 68% of callers also worried about regular use of category C drugs.

A major issue is where to go for help. The transition from dependant child to responsible adult means that accessing services becomes

the responsibility of the young adult and not the parent. When a parent is looking desperately for help for their child, this inflexibility can have dramatic and sometimes tragic results impacting on all the family, as some of the responses to our web survey show.

5.2 Focus groups

In 2007 we conducted three focus groups with C2DE (household income of less than £20,000p.a.) mothers of children 18+ who are still living at home:

- Group 1: Parents with children 18+ at home who are now working.
- Group 2: Parents with children 18+ who are at university or college, some locally, some further away.
- Group 3: Parents with children 18+ who have been through college/university and are now back at home.

We were looking for their views on the following issues:

- How well does living with a young adult work?
- Are they and their child happy?
- What are the sources of disagreement or tension, if any?
- How important is money – are there arguments about this?
- Have parents made financial sacrifices to help their children?
- How do they feel about empty nest syndrome and its impact?
- How easy or difficult is it for them to ‘let go’ of their children?
- Can they see a point when their children will leave home?
- How do they feel about this period of their lives?
- If children stay at home for longer, will this compromise their later lives?

The findings were mixed, with parents of grown up children who are working feeling more relaxed about the situation. Parents of children who come back after leaving to go to university or college were more likely to talk about frustrations and tension. These parents felt this was because children had become accustomed to a different way of life with few rules and that they found it hard to compromise their independence.

Clashes between different lifestyles were a major worry and parents found it difficult to 'tell off' their children now they were more adult, yet at the same time they say their young adults also regressed to behaving like children at home. Several felt that their children's attitudes had worsened since they had been away whilst others talked about their children being in 'a sort of no man's land'.

"She's living at home, her boyfriend's living in Chichester and her freedom's restricted. She's in 'no man's land.'"

Parents' group 3

Where young adults were working but still living at home, there seemed to be more harmony with fewer sources of tension and argument. Parents felt that family life had changed very little – their children have simply switched from education to work – while their role had stayed pretty much the same. Most believed that their children were also perfectly happy at home and had neither the impetus nor the means to leave.

The one 'gripe' was that they felt their children liked the fact that they lived in comfortable, catered, cheap accommodation and yet had their own independent lifestyle – but sometimes the clash between the family and the way their children lived outside of the home, caused tensions.

Money worries

Money was undoubtedly a source of tension, particularly for those with children who were still at college/university. Even where children were earning, parents worried about how on earth their child would be financially able to

leave, because of the costs of renting or buying a property. Many parents felt there was no inducement for their children to leave. Most envisaged that their children would live at home until their late 20s, if not longer.

- **"I can't see an end to it."**
- **"There's no light at the end of the tunnel."**
- **"It's really hard for them to save for properties – in fact, it's impossible."**
- **"It seems so out of reach, beyond what they can achieve."**

Comments from all groups

Financial issues identified included:

- The cost of education which was a strain for many parents. Even where fees and living was being funded by student loans, courses could require investment in equipment.
- A few parents had helped towards fees and one had funded the whole lot because of the problems that had been caused by her son's debts.
- Even when students worked to earn money, it seemed to disappear pretty rapidly.
- A couple of parents admitted that they simply could not afford to have more than one child at college/university.
- A few believed that the only way their children could leave home was for them to release equity from their house to help.

The empty nest

"I've lived my life through my children."

Parents' group 2

Parents were eloquent about their feelings when their children left for university and college which contrasted with the frustrations they felt when their graduate children returned to the nest. In particular parents:

- Worried that their children would not cope and hated that they could not be there to help them.

- Felt that a completely 'empty nest' would leave a big hole in their lives or doubted the relationship with their partner would survive.

"I just can't see an empty house...."

Parents' group 2

- Some recognised how much of their time and lives centred around their children:

"What will I do? – it's my whole routine."

"We'll have to foster...."

Parents' group 1

- A few openly admitted that they feared 'feeling redundant':

"I love it when they phone me up – you want to feel needed."

Parents' group 2

5.3 Web survey

Parentline Plus posted a survey on the website in late 2007, over a 2 week timeframe. We asked parents to tell us their stories and discuss the issues parents face when their teenagers become young adults and set off into the wide world – whether it be for work, college or university – and then just keep coming back. We asked what the empty nest feels like for parents who wave goodbye to their 18 or 19 year olds, just to have them come back home.

We received 52 completed surveys. We expected a lower level of response because we had asked specifically that only parents living with young adults respond. 68% of parents were talking about a son living at home on a permanent basis. 43% were still at home because they were students; 37% were working and 13% were unemployed. Parents identified the following reasons for their young adults still being at home:

They enjoy living at home	36%
Studying at a local college/university	31%
Lack of a job	15%
Wants to be near boyfriend/girlfriend	10%
Lack of money	8%

Once again there were many parents talking about the clash of lifestyles and the difficulty of imposing house 'rules' on children who are adult and who may be working. The mess, the food, the arguments about cleaning up, not phoning about being in or out, echo many of the worries of parents of teenagers rather than young adults and reinforces the views of parents in our focus groups who felt their children regressed when they lived at home and that this caused much tension. Treating the home as a hotel was a common frustration.

"My husband and I get annoyed when he lies in bed late and is not actively looking for work. Also get annoyed that his room is so untidy and that he doesn't clear his plates, glasses etc from his room. He sometimes forgets to let us know whether he will be home for mealtimes."

Web survey 2007

One parent told us about their eldest son:

"He left home to join army for 2 years then came home as army life did not suit. As he had been in army since age of 17 went through a rebellious stage at 19 that is just, fingers crossed coming to an end. This has been very difficult for my husband and I as we had got used to a peaceful life. Our home became a war ground of constant arguments about alcohol misuse, bad language and lack of respect for us and our home by our son."

Web survey 2007

The boomerang effect can be a strain. One moment your child is at home, the next off they go, and come back when they have finished having adventures, working away or because they have broken up with their partner. Parents talk about how they adjust every time. Others feel that there is no one right way to do this – pointing out that children grow up in different ways and have different levels of need and confidence.

We asked parents to tell us about the effect that having young adults at home had on siblings and we are concerned that many talk about clashes, especially when brothers and sisters are much younger. One parent told us

about their 11 year old daughter who did not understand why her grown up brother 'gets everything for nothing'. Teenagers resent their elder siblings because they seem to get away with things and one parent joked that her teenage son was fed up being bossed about by his older brother.

Yet many parents talk about the love they have for their grown up children and how much they enjoy seeing them and having them coming back to live. Several talked about feeling that by living at home they knew their children were safe and this was enough to make up for the frustrations about not helping around the house. Others were very proud of how their children were forging their adult life:

"He has a nice, undemanding lifestyle with lots of expendable income and no responsibilities for the practicalities of running a home. We get on well and he has lots of freedom with few demands."
Web survey 2007

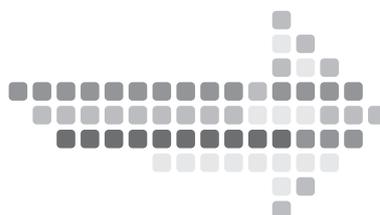
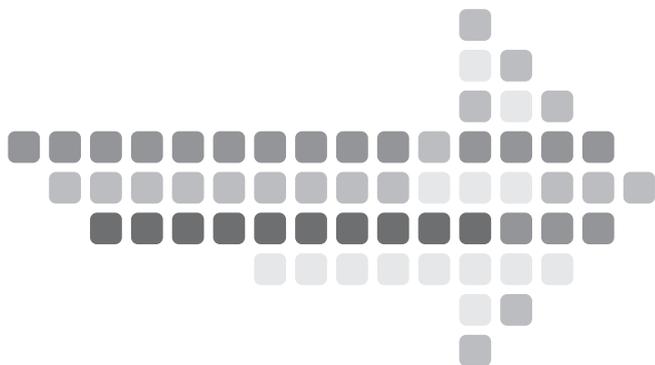
"It's good having our young people at home with us. One is married and living away, another job-hunting from home, and the third is at 6th form college. We try to treat them as adults and make their own decisions, but they share their thinking with us and look to us for support and advice which we are happy to give. We are proud of them and enjoy their company. They'll be away soon enough!"
Web survey 2007

Another said:

"In the beginning things were very strained, we all made mistakes and we were not communicating effectively. My husband and I realised that we had to reset boundaries just as we did when he was a small child. This was difficult at first as there was a lot of rebellion, I'm talking a year's worth!"
Web survey 2007

Several parents sounded almost nostalgic for a time when they had imagined they would be free of parental responsibilities:

"Much more involved parenting for much longer. Much more exposure to aspects of their lives that I thought would have been more private - like their relationships - it's not like when I was their age."
Web survey 2007



6. Looking at the future

Throughout the consultations with parents, there are several clear strands with many parents saying similar things about the wishes, frustrations and pleasures around living with young adults. Often there is tension between giving love and care whilst knowing that their child must develop more independence and responsibility. Parents generally want their children to fly the nest and to have happy, positive and financially secure lives. Throughout the research we can see how parents are letting go and their love for their grown up children are shown primarily when they say what they want for their children:

“That he understands himself and how to make his own way happily in the world.”

“Ideally I would like her to get a good job not too far away from us, but as long as she’s happy in her work, don’t mind where it is.”

“He moves on when he is in a relationship and ready to be in the next phase of his life – hopefully by or before 25.”

“For him to be happy. To stay in full time employment to enjoy a good lifestyle. To maintain a good relationship with his girlfriend.”

“I would like him to travel and see the world in order to understand cultures and see what else there is out there... I would like him to find some happiness in this horrible world.”

“That they are financially secure, able to afford own accommodation and a job she found fulfilling and satisfying.”

“For the eldest to find a flat and settle in it and the youngest to gain more confidence and move out.”

“I would like my children to see what I have given up for them over the years so they have been able to have the things they wanted. But I think this will only happen when they have their own children.”

“I would like my son to get some counselling and become stronger emotionally and to have strong and healthy relationships with lots of people and for him to manage his money well and to get a lot of fun and enjoyment out of life and to be a good person with a good character and for him to be happy.”

“I would like my sons to get a job and learn what it is like to earn a living. Make new friends in the work place. Study more and not to expect things just to happen because that is what they want. In other words become adults.”

Web survey 2007

7. Conclusion

Parenting, and living, with young adults is obviously a challenging transition for the family which requires adaptation and mutual respect if it is to work well. Parentline Plus' research demonstrates the love parents have for their grown up children whilst also acknowledging that having them living at home can be a frustrating and difficult experience. If there is a high level of conflict between parent and young adult, there can be worrying consequences as is shown by the analysis of calls to Parentline and some of the desperate stories posted on our website. As this story shows, the most serious issues are about being taken for granted, the drain on family finances, the feeling of being used.

"Our eldest son is 21 and for the last 5 years has done almost nothing. He got 7 good GCSEs at 16, despite doing very little work, went on to 6th form, dropped out and changed colleges 3 times by the time he was 17.5. On his 18th birthday he said 'I'm going to a friends BBQ' and we didn't see him for nearly 6 months and didn't know where he was. He wrote to us just before the Xmas and asked if he could come home which of course we said yes. Over the subsequent 3 years he's done a few months work at agencies and pubs but always leaves after a few weeks. He can't tolerate being told what to do. He sometimes claims unemployment benefit but dislikes being put on New Deal and signs off when they want him to go on. So basically he's lived off us for all this time and done nothing. We can ill afford it."
Web survey 2007

In fact, throughout the research, finances are shown to be the source of much worry and concern by parents. Where a child has gained a college place, guilt can set in because a parent feels they have little financial support to offer their child. Lack of financial security and mounting debt is often the reason why young people continue to live at home or return after college. Then there are ongoing arguments over the young adult not getting a job or contributing to household expenses. These tensions can mount and result in significant levels of antagonism and misery.

In the main it is reassuring that families find ways of muddling along, just as they have throughout a child's growing up. Grown up children want to be with their parents – not just because they cannot afford to be independent. Where the ground rules about living together are mutually agreed and adhered to, the result is very positive.

Negative: "My husband and I find it more difficult to have time to ourselves."

Positive: "We enjoy her company and she is willing to help with household chores."
Web survey 2007

Yet, it is not all about giving a young adult the best chance to fly the nest. Parents have wishes too and throughout this research there is a strong message that parents want their kids to move on and they want to start their lives anew, rebuild their life as partners and to find new opportunities and challenges.

"I would like to see him in an 'undomestic' environment in an adult-adult context rather than a parent-child one."
Web survey 2007

8. Recommendations

- Parents must be included in all initiatives aimed at young people not in education or employment. A factor that is holding back both parent and young adult can be traced to the government policy for education, employment and even housing policies. Where young people living at home are not engaged in education or employment – the NEET ones – clashes and even violence can result. Government currently is making much of breaking the NEET mould but there is a long way to go and we urge policy makers and providers to include support for the parents of these young people. We are concerned that parents are missed out of this agenda because their children are now adults.
- There is remarkable synergy between government's aspirations for young people, and the wishes of their parents. Government must seek out ways to communicate with parents of young adults and to support them to influence their children's work and personal choices. By focusing all the communication directly to young people, parents find it difficult to talk with conviction about choices around work, training or higher education because they do not have all the facts.
- Finances are a real stumbling block. This is especially the case when students have graduated and have to come home because of debt. Banks encourage young adults to sign up for graduate loans or overdraft facilities. Parents should know more about these products and help their children to read between the lines and to help them take responsibility for their own finances long term.
- There is also a real worry that where a family is in crisis and that crisis is precipitated by conflict with a stay at home young adult, parents can face a closed door when they look for help for their child. Services take the view that the child is an adult and therefore has to seek help themselves. Whilst this may be correct, it does not help the parent sort out how to cope. Parents may have little influence on their adult child at this point. They may need support to assert what influence and authority they can have, and support to decide and assert their boundaries. Where adult children are violent for instance, or misusing drugs, the answer may be to insist that their child leaves home – but this is a very difficult decision for parents to make and they may well need support and information to make it. For example knowing what their child might be entitled to by way of housing and benefits as well as support with the emotional impact on the parents and the child. Those working in primary care, social services, Job Centres or education need to take into account the fact that parents are still in a role of care in this context.
- Society – and particularly the media – must recognise that for the vast majority of parents, love and respect is at the core of the family even when a young adult lives at home. This is not about lazy layabouts, it is often related directly to external circumstances such as debt, low wages or even, lack of employment.
- Living together – mutual gain and love: The parents' stories are in the main very positive. Family life carries on and parent and child continue to love and respect each other, learning how to adapt in new ways. Parents have to adjust to their children's independence and see this as an opportunity for themselves to find new interests outside the family. Young adults need to adjust their lifestyles if they come back to the family home, and to acknowledge the restrictions that living with family has in terms of independent living. Working out a mutual third way is needed.
- Government website Directgov and other sites with details of colleges, student loans, training opportunities etc. should include information for parents as well as the young people. This would allow parents to help their young people make more informed choices and to alert them of any forthcoming policy changes.

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Want to find out more?

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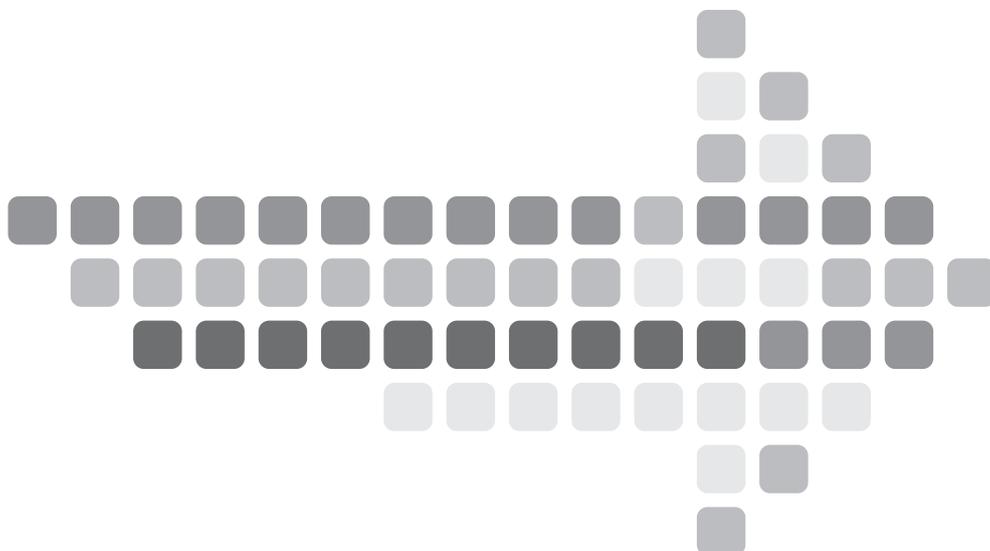
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Directgov

Gives information for prospective students, for example on how to apply for student loans, grants and bursaries.

Website: <http://unimoney.direct.gov.uk/>



Parentline Plus is a national charity and a leading organisation in the development and delivery of support for parents and families. We work to recognise and to value the different types of families that exist and to shape and expand the services available to them. We understand that it is not possible to separate children's needs from the needs of their parents and carers and encourage people to see it as a sign of strength to seek help. We believe it is normal for all parents to have difficulties from time to time.



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