

Monitoring Our College Kids for **Suicide Risk – a “them” issue;
Monitoring Ourselves for **Empty-Nest Syndrome** – an “us” issue**

Empty-Nest Syndrome

I. Definition:

1. “Empty Nest syndrome is a feeling of grief and loneliness parents may feel when their children leave home, such as to live on their own or to attend college. It is not a clinical condition.”
2. “Empty nest syndrome is not a clinical diagnosis, but rather describes a transition period in which people experience feelings of loneliness or loss. While parents encourage their children to become independent adults, the experience of sending children off into the world can be painful.”

II. What to Do?

1. This was the plan all along. Take satisfaction in a successful “launch.” You really did not want them to remain home forever, did you?
2. The relationship between parents and children is one of constant renegotiation and realignment anyway. Enjoy the new relationship. Look forward to more new relationships with your child.
3. Reallocate your energies into productive and positive avenues.
4. Other kids in your home are also adjusting.
5. Other adults in your home are adjusting too. Reconnect and rejuvenate relationships.
6. Maintain contact (but let them set the new rules); maintain some family-contact traditions. The electronic age is awesome.
7. Look on the bright side(s).
8. Things change; things stay the same.

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Suicide Risk

I. Two Statements of Fact:

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students (since the 1950s).

The vast majority of kids survive college with normal amounts of distress-related wear and tear.

II. Two Extremes to Avoid:

Perseverating over your child and mistakenly assuming that normal college-age “distressors” are going to lead them to take their own life.

Blithely assuming that it cannot happen to “My Child,” failing to monitor risk factors (from a discrete distance), and not maintaining effective contact.

III. What to look for:

1. *Perfect Storms*; these are times when several “distressors” pile up.
2. *Double Binds*; these are lose-lose situations that leave people with no easy or clear-cut out.
3. *New Territory*; these are distressing situations and increasing demands for which your child has little preparation or experience.
4. *“Cluster” Events*; one suicide tends to break down the taboo against suicide and sometimes opens the door for other suicides.
5. *Big Changes and Odd Reactions* (remain aware of (i) the possibility of untreated depression and (ii) the possibility of your denial).
6. *Any Mention of Suicide*.
7. *History of depression, suicide attempts, or etc.*