

# AN EMPTY NEST AND A FULL MARRIAGE

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*Why is it that so many men and women who have weathered countless ups and downs over years of marriage suddenly give up? That was the question I was asking myself after I heard another 50-something wife and mother of adult children casually discuss her lifeless marriage. Instead of being concerned at the current state of her marital relationship, this smart, have-it-all-together woman was pretty much saying her marriage was no longer worth fighting for. Her apathy left me feeling saddened.*

What used to be a rare occurrence has become a common response to typical marital difficulties: Men and women are casually announcing their plans to [divorce after their children leave home](#). Some couples state they have nothing in common anymore. Others say the only reason they stayed married for as long as they did was for the kids' sake. Then there are those who admit they simply aren't willing to make the effort it takes to create a full marriage that spans both time and seasons of change.

Marriage is hard work, and everyone who has been married knows it. What people don't talk about is that with every major life change, couples have to spend time and energy re-inventing their relationship. The empty-nest season can usher in emotionally charged situations and major lifestyle adjustments. To help you navigate these marital challenges, consider the following:

Keep talking. Let me make one thing perfectly clear: I love a quiet house. Still, after rearing four children, these walls can feel eerily still at times, which is why I advocate [talking to one's spouse](#). Regularly. Daily. Hourly, if possible. I would never suggest that an empty-nest mom immediately unload her quota of unused words on her unsuspecting husband the minute he walks in the door after work. On the other hand, I've seen more damage done when couples decide it's too much hassle to keep talking to each other.

Rather than sit silently at a cozy dinner table for two, why not plan a few pleasant topics of conversation for each evening? Make the dinner hour a bright spot in your day by sincerely inquiring about each other's time while you were apart. No single syllable replies allowed! Ask questions that require full-bodied responses. Then — just like playing tennis — volley that energetic verbiage back and forth until you score a relational win for the day.

Put your spouse first. Some husbands and wives believe that after their children leave home they won't be privy to their kids' problems anymore. More often, parents find themselves on the receiving end of news more troubling than ever before.

Don't be surprised if your adult son or daughter regularly dumps his or her angst at your doorstep. Even as you help your adult child process his or her concerns, keep asking yourself if you are [putting your spouse's needs above your child's](#). There will be times when you need to say no to your child out of respect for your spouse's peace of mind, health or even the occasional personal preference. Keep the respect and deference level high toward each other. Take tender care of your primary relationship so you'll both have what you need to responsibly care for your adult children when they need your help.

Choose activities together. One of the best aspects of having been married to the same person for so long is that both of you understand the other's likes and dislikes. Gone are the early days of guessing what your partner might enjoy, and now is the time to start [dreaming](#) as you put to paper some imaginative ideas for having fun together. To start, make his and hers lists. Later, bring the two together and create a master list that blends the best from both. Don't be afraid to try new adventures. The main point is to

make plans that both of you can anticipate together. Get that? Fun. Together. Repeat. Often.

Don't allow the past to ruin the future. Most married couples could admit to knowing there were times when they could have given up on each other. For my husband and me, it doesn't take much for either of us to peer back into our past and dredge up heartaches or pains we caused each other. In hopes of not letting past hurts and disappointments ruin our future hopes and dreams, we need to intentionally have a terrible memory about what's past and painful at the same time we develop an eagle eye for recalling every wonderful thing our spouse has done for us.