

How to parent your adult children

June 2015 Newsletter



Whoops! There's a mistake in this title. Did you catch it?

Here's the answer: You can't "parent" adult children. Once your kids are grown up, your parenting job is over. You'll always be the parent, but your role will change.

What's your new job description?

When you're parenting young kids, your job is "hands on." You set rules, discipline and keep your kids safe. You help them grow to be self-reliant, resourceful and resilient.

When you have adult children, your job is "hands off." You become a friend, support, resource — and a consultant, if and when called upon.

Consultants give advice based on their expertise or experience. As the parent of a grown up, your services as consultant may or may not be desired. And it can be a tricky situation even if you're asked. Why?

- If you give advice to your kids, it implies they can't come up with the solution themselves.
- If your advice doesn't work, it's your fault.
- If your advice does work, your adult children won't feel stronger from having solved the problem on their own.

How not to give advice

Consider not giving advice, even if your kids ask. Instead, try to engage them in conversations where you help them explore options. Then let them make the final decisions.

If you use this approach, you're helping them discover and evaluate solutions. You bring your experience to this process as

you suggest options they may not have considered. But in the end, they're still making the choices.

Be available, but not pushy

Think back to when you were a younger adult. How much involvement did you want your parents to have in your everyday life? Didn't you want to stand on your own two feet? Your adult kids are likely to have the same feelings.

Tone down criticism and turn up praise

Criticizing your adult kids doesn't motivate them. Instead, it deflates them. That makes them less likely to share with you. Finding and praising strengths is the real motivator. And it's more likely to keep communication open between you, too.

Try not to feel shut out

It's natural to hope your kids will be in touch often. But try not to be hurt or angry if contact isn't as frequent as you'd like.

It's not a personal thing: Your kids are taking the next developmental step by building their own adult lives. They're off on the adventure of a lifetime.

Time to refill your empty nest

At one time, it may have seemed you'd be raising your kids forever. But parenting is a "phase" like many others.

Once your kids are grown, it's good for you and them if you continue to lead a productive, satisfying life. Put your energies into fulfilling old interests and pursuing new ones.

Show trust and confidence

You raised 'em! Now let them spread their wings and show the results of all your hard work.