

LEARNING TO LET GO

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I think every parent struggles with letting their child go, especially mothers. It is not just once, but many times through the years we find ourselves wanting to hold onto our precious children. It starts from when we first leave them with a sitter to the time they walk up the aisle.

I vividly recall my 3 year-old son's first day at Kindergarten. I was so worried that he would be traumatized by me leaving him with complete strangers, I could not pluck up the courage to walk away. My mind was made up for me when the caregivers told me to 'just go'!

Then there was the first day of school where I thought he would be lonely and frightened and the first game of football where I worried he might get hurt. There was the first time he failed, the first girlfriend and finally the day he married. I suffered some of the same personal trauma with my daughter, although I was a little more prepared for those feelings of 'loss' the second time around.

Why is it so hard to let go? Obviously, we mothers never believe anyone can care for our little Johnnie/Susan the way we can. We know their needs, their moods and we sense when they are starting to become anxious. We have a natural instinct to care for and protect our little ones at all cost. If I am really honest, I think I enjoyed being the answer to my child's every need. I liked to be needed, to be the first one my kids turned to when they wanted to be comforted or needed anything.

As they enter the school system others begin to assume authority in our kids' lives. We are no longer their only source of help, care and comfort. Beyond our immediate sphere of influence we cannot always be there to protect them. This becomes disconcerting for a mother, especially when tales come home from school and we only hear one side of the story. Many a time, I offered to go down to the school waving my imaginary purple umbrella and sort out some offender. That threat became a joke because my kids would always howl, "No, Mom! PLEASE don't come to school." What? I was no longer viewed by my own kids as their champion, their only solver of all problems? Hmmm!

I was beginning to realize I needed an attitude adjustment. It wasn't that my children no longer needed me. It was the fact that they were growing older and were beginning to face the world and solve problems without me, finding other sources of help, e.g. their football coach, their teacher, their friends and maybe even their friends' parents.

So, what makes parents feel more comfortable about letting their kids 'go'? The first thing we need to be assured of is that they will make wise choices and clearly recognize that there are both positive or negative consequences for each action taken or word spoken. Home is a safe place to practice becoming independent. The danger is in constantly anticipating their problems and answering them without giving kids a chance to fly on their own while they are still at home.

Once we recognize that our role has changed we need to re-establish a life of our own and not rely on our children to fulfill our needs. They should have ceased being the center of the universe as preschoolers. All through our kids' growing up my husband and I were working on our interests as well as caring for them. We had a dance band. We had a small farm. We studied at University. We had full time jobs and we were fully engaged in numerous church activities. By our children living in a constantly revolving and stimulating home environment, we taught them how to set and achieve goals, to problem solve, deal with failures and most of all how to live and enjoy life.

There is no denying the internal turmoil we have when we see our child give their heart to another. I defy any mother to tell me she did not shed a tear on her child's wedding day. Yet, that special love a child has for his/her parents will always be there as long as we have not smothered them from the beginning, to the point that they wanted to 'escape'.

Our kids need to know they go with our blessing and that we will always be that 'go to' person when their other trusted resources don't have the answer. Our adult children have become our best friends. I hope yours are or will be, too.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com