

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

In another few weeks my only child is leaving home to attend college. I'm having a hard time adjusting to it, though my husband doesn't seem to give it a second thought. Ryan is a great kid – he earned a partial scholarship – and is excited to be going to the state university. I don't want to rain on his parade, but I feel sad, useless, and at loose ends. I've spent the last seventeen years being a full-time mom so I don't have a clue what I'll do once he's gone .

-- Deborah

Dear Deborah,

Your son leaving home and starting his life as a young adult is a right of passage for *both* of you. You've accomplished what good mothers have with their children throughout time. You've helped him learn to walk, and now you must help him learn how to walk away.

Allow yourself to grieve, for this is a loss. You're losing the everyday companionship of your son and, also, a role that has defined you for a long time. Like losses of all kinds, this one holds both pain and the opportunity for growth and change.

Many cultures help parents and young people during this time of change, by calling the community together for a coming-of-age ritual. Rituals help our unconscious psyche to acknowledge change, to adjust to our new reality, allow for self-expression, and give others the chance to show support.

Young people in some Native American tribes must go alone into the wilderness for a few days – a vision quest – and return to a welcoming community. There is a full understanding that the child who walked out of the village has now returned as a full-fledged adult member of the group.

In our society, we have no such rites, though it's not uncommon to hold a graduation or going-away party for teenagers heading off to college. Consider adding some ritual that adds a dimension of soul to whatever festivity you are planning to wish Ryan "Godspeed." You can keep the cake and balloons, of course, but give some attention to creating some activity that touches your hearts.

If Ryan's friends are also going off to college or to jobs as they begin their adult lives, perhaps you could invite their families to participate in whatever event you plan. This could be a wonderful way to support each other.

Do you remember bonding with other mothers of young kids when Ryan faced his first day of first grade (and his first full day away from you)? This is another such threshold -- exciting, but bittersweet -- and it always helps to share such moments with others who understand your feelings.

You will not rain on Ryan's parade if you were to honestly tell him how you feel. Let him know that you're excited for him and his future but that you will sure miss him and that hurts your heart. I'll bet he'll be happy to hear what you have to say.

It's great that Ryan is excited about college, but it's very likely that he also has mixed feelings. If he's like most young folks in this situation, he's rarin' to go and also a

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony

8/3/05

little sad to be leaving his family, friends, and familiar places. An honest conversation will allow both of you (and maybe Dad, too) to become even closer and more authentic with each other.

It's important to remember that your role as mother – no matter how important it has been and will continue to be – is just one aspect of who you are as a person. Along with your sad feelings now that Ryan is moving on with his life, leave room for new roles and new ways of being in the world.

I'm certain that you had many other interests before Ryan came along. What were they? What are the things that fill you with passion? Have you always wanted to learn to paint but seventeen years of mothering limited your artistic expression to finger painting with your son? If so, take a painting class and go to artist show as local galleries or museums.

Would it be of benefit to your family to have some extra income (especially now that you've got at least some tuition bills – ouch!)? If that's the case, consider getting a part-time job or, hey, start a new career in something you love. There are many opportunities to volunteer, and I guarantee that you'll feel more than useful when you get involved.

American writer Louis L'Amour had a beautiful way of describing where you are in your life right now, "There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning."

Grieve the ending but celebrate the beginning.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.