



Extension News Column

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Boomerang children—this is a new phenomena that many empty nesters are facing. This is the term for adult children that have moved out of the house, only to return because of the current economic conditions. Sometimes the empty nest doesn't stay empty.

Many of us have gotten used to the empty nest. Along comes an economic downturn and the kids move back home. This causes friction to both sides of this equation.

I visited with a friend recently who had an adult child return home with two children in tow. Because her daughter is hunting for a job, my friend is filling in some of the gaps with child care—bringing on the challenge of when to be a grandma and when to be the adult in charge. Things have been a little tense at her house, with money challenges, different expectations on employment, and even a few relationship challenges.

Remember that the adult child moving back home will change the household expenses. So those adult children have a responsibility to contribute to the household. It is important to talk openly and honestly about money arrangements.

First, we need to get a handle on the costs of maintaining the household. What is the cost for food, electricity, cable, and other expenses? How much will they increase as the adult child moves back home?

Discuss everyone's expectations in regards to employment. Will the adult child work? Or are they returning to school or for retraining and are not going to work? This also leads to the discussion of whether they should take short-term employment or instead wait for exactly the right job. By discussing these issues as a family, no one will be surprised when decisions are made.

Consider these issues:

- Is there a time limit? Till they are retrained? Till college graduation? For one year? Make sure you establish how long they will be at home.
- If you offer financial help, is it a gift or a loan? This will avoid hurt feelings if the money isn't paid back.
- The cost of food will increase, that's a given. Will there be a change in the type of food purchased? If your child only drinks "organically raised, save the rain forest" coffee and you drink whatever is on sale, compromises must be made and paid for.
- How will visitors be handled, especially overnight visitors?

- If the adult child has children, who will handle discipline? Will you remain a grandparent, or will you become a part time parent? In addition, how will your child feel about you correcting their children?
- Will you eat together? This seems a petty issue, but there is nothing any more irritating than preparing a meal for someone who doesn't show up. Or worse yet, waiting a meal for them.

Our son has just moved back home since he transferred back to UAF from attending college out of state. He's in college, so we don't expect him to contribute to the expenses, but we can see that there is an end—when he gets out of school. Though we have talked about many of these issues, there's still a couple we haven't gotten to yet. So we have work to do.

It is a challenge for him to suddenly deal with living under our rules after setting his own rules for years. It is a challenge for us to have him back since we had just gotten used to only having the two of us. Many parents, like us, are dealing with changes in our family dynamics due to economic conditions.

Sharing a home is a big decision. Effective family communications is critical to making a smooth transition.